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# SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Passengers and locals near the derailed coaches of the Dibrugarh Express after an accident, in Gonda district, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

# Another blow to Rlys as train derails in UP killing 2

**GONDA/NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Two passengers were killed and 34 injured when eight coaches of the 15904 Chandigarh-Dibrugarh Express derailed near Gonda in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday, an official said.

Ambulances and medical teams were rushed to the spot between Motiganj and Jhilahi railway stations, about 150km from the state capital, as news of the derailment came in.

The loco pilot heard the "sound of a blast" before the derailment, an official told reporters. But he did not elaborate.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak told PTI that four people were killed, with district magistrate Neha Sharma too giving out the same number to the media. But about five hours after the 2.35 pm, the authorities revised the figures with Sharma saying there was one death. "Prima facie, when teams reached the spot people were laying scattered there in bad shape due to which confusion prevailed," she said.

The dead are Saroj Kumar Singh, 31, a resident of Araria in Bihar, and Rahul (38) from Chandigarh. Bad weather affected the rescue operation for a while, but police and the State Disaster Response Force completed the task.

Even before the relief teams arrived, passengers in the Assam-bound train had begun pouring out of the toppled coaches. Some of them went back again to pull out their luggage. They then sat near the tracks, waiting as rescuers arrived. "For a moment the coach was filled with dust and it was all dark. I don't remember what happened in the next few seconds. I only remember the cries and that a passenger pulled my hand, and helped me get out of the window," Sandeep Kumar recalled.

The Railway Ministry said a high level inquiry has been ordered, apart from the probe by the Commission of Railway Safety. The ministry said an enhanced ex-gratia amount of Rs 10 lakh will be given to the relatives of those killed. The grievously injured passengers will get Rs 2.5 lakh and those with minor injuries Rs 50,000. The authorities released several helpline numbers, including 8957400965 (Gonda) and 8957409292 (Lucknow) and 9957555960 (Dibrugarh).

*—PTI*

A part of an under-construction bridge on the Badrinath National Highway collapses in Uttarakhand on Thursday. The bridge was built at a cost of about Rs 67 crore under the Chardham Road Project **PHOTO: X/SCREENGRAB**

# SC asks NTA to publish city, centre-wise results of NEET

## NTA must release it by 20 July & mask the aspirants' name

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the National Testing Agency (NTA) to declare by 12 noon of 20 July the centre and city-wise results of controversy-ridden NEET-UG 2024 while masking the identities of the aspirants, saying it wanted to ascertain whether candidates appearing at allegedly tainted centres scored more marks than those elsewhere.

As it strove to address the allegations of malpractices in the conduct of the 5 May examination, a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said any order for conducting it afresh has to be on concrete conclusion that the alleged leak was "systemic" and the sanctity of the entire process was affected.

Supreme Court **PHOTO: PTI**

"We want the identity of students be masked. You can have dummy roll numbers. But let us see it centre-wise what is the marks pattern," the bench said. The top court will resume hearing arguments on 22 July on a batch of pleas seeking cancellation, re-test and court-monitored probe into the allegations of malpractice in the prestigious exam.

The bench noted the counsel for the petitioners have submitted that it would be appropriate if the result of NEET-UG 2024 examination was published on the NTA website so as to bring about transparency with regard to centre-wise marks obtained by candidates.

At the outset, the bench said it has prioritised the hearing on the pleas over other cases as these have "social ramifications" and lakhs of students are waiting for the outcome.

It rejected the submission of the petitioners that they were handicapped as the CBI's status report filed in the court was not made available to them.

*—PTI*

### 4 medicos from AIIMS arrested in NEET leak

CBI on Thursday arrested four MBBS students of AIIMS Patna in NEET-UG paper leak. The third year students Chandan Singh, Rahul Anant, and Kumar Shanu, and one second year student Karan Jain were arrested after detailed questioning by CBI.

—PTI

**DODA, KUPWARA HIT**

# Gunfights, terror attacks rock J&K

**JAMMU, 18 JULY**

Two Army personnel were injured in a gunfight with terrorists in a remote forest village in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district on Thursday. In a separate incident two terrorists were killed as security forces foiled an infiltration bid along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district on Thursday, officials said.

Officials said, as security forces continued their search in the region for the ultras who killed four soldiers three days ago.

The gunfight, lasting more than an hour, took place at Jaddan Bata village in the Kastigarh area around 2 am when the terrorists opened fire on a temporary camp established in a government school for the ongoing search operation, they said.

One of the critically injured army personnel was evacuated to the Udhampur-based command hospital by an advanced light helicopter despite challenging weather conditions, a defence spokesperson said.

In a separate incident, security forces guarding a forward post opened fire after observing suspicious movement near the LoC in the Sunderbani sector of Rajouri district late Wednesday night. "Security forces on the ground are engaged in a well-coordinated operation against terrorists," Deputy Inspector General of Police, Doda-Kishtwar and Ramban Range, Shridhar Patil said. Since the beginning of this year, 27 people, including 11 security personnel, a village defence guard and five terrorists, were killed in a dozen terror attacks in six districts of Jammu.

*—PTI*

## In a 1st, Nepal will export power to B'desh via India

**KATHMANDU, 18 JULY**

Nepal will sign a tripartite power trading deal next week to export 40MW of electricity to Bangladesh via India, a senior official said on Thursday. This will be the first time in history that the Himalayan nation will sell electricity to a third country other than India. Ground has been cleared for the three countries to sign the agreement on exporting electricity to Bangladesh, said Chandan Kumar Ghosh, spokesperson at Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) -- the government-owned electricity body. The Power Sales Agreement will be signed by officials from the NEA, the Bangladesh Power Development Board and the NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Ltd of India at a function here on 28 July. Under the agreement, the NEA will export 40 MW of hydroelectricity to Bangladesh via India from 15 June to 15 November every year. *—PTI*

## Protests grip Bihar as 4 workers die in septic tank

**MOTIHARI, 18 JULY**

Four labourers died after inhaling toxic gases inside a septic tank in Bihar's East Champaran district on Thursday, triggering violent protests by a mob which vandalised a private clinic, set fire to an ambulance and attacked a police party, leaving two personnel injured. DSP Kantesh Kumar Mishra said of the five persons who had entered the tank, one survived and is undergoing treatment. "The incident took place in a village under Dhaka police station area. After they fell unconscious inside the septic tank, the five labourers were rushed to a nearby private clinic. By the time, a crowd had gathered. Family members of some of the deceased blamed the deaths on laxity of doctors, leading to violent protests", Mishra added. *—PTI*

**TOLL REACHES 25**

# Violence grips Dhaka as quota clashes kill 18 more

**DHAKA, 18 JULY**

At least 18 more people were killed in Bangladesh on Thursday as violence escalated in the capital Dhaka and elsewhere over student protests demanding reforms of the quota system for government jobs, taking the toll to 25 since the protests erupted.

University students in Dhaka and other cities have been holding rallies for days against the system of reserving some public sector jobs for the relatives of war heroes, who fought for the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Concurring with the number of deaths, the private Somoy Television channel said police continued to use rubber bullets, tear gas and sound grenades to disperse the protesters. Earlier, six people, most of them students, were killed on Tuesday while another death was reported overnight, taking the total death toll to 18 since the protest started more than a week ago. However, police have not yet issued a statement on the casualties. The escalated violence prompted authorities to shut the metro rail inside the capital alongside the railway services to and from Dhaka since Thursday afternoon. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Pages 4, 5 & 6***

# State braces for rain, flood as red alert on

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

Extremely heavy rainfall is very likely over coastal and south interior Karnataka for the next three days, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The IMD has issued a red alert for 19 and 20 July in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada and south interior Karnataka.

The Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre has observed that with the rainfall continuing in the same intensity Cauvery reservoir will likely reach its full capacity in three days. Harangi and Kabini reservoirs have already reached full capacity.

Meanwhile, the district administration of both Kodagu and Udupi districts have already announced holidays for schools and PU colleges. A holiday was also declared for the five taluks in Dakshina Kannada. Heavy rains lash Mangaluru and surrounding areas as well Also, as the water level in Netravati River breached danger level in Uppinangady, all crest gates were opened in two dams built across the river. A landslide occurred in near Dudhsagar Temple at Anmod Ghat near Goa disrupting vehicular traffic movement from the ghat to Belagavi. Two more bodies were recovered during the search operations in Uttara Kannada, where a massive landslide killed six people two days ago. *—PTI*

Cauvery is in spate in Hogenakkal with increased inflow due to release of surplus water from dams, in Dharmapuri, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

## ASSAM'S NEW BILL TO ABOLISH MUSLIM MARRIAGES ACT

**GUWAHATI, 18 JULY**

The Assam Cabinet on Thursday approved a Bill to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorce Registration Act and Rules of 1935, which permitted underage marriages under specific conditions, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The Repealing Bill 2024 is likely to be presented during the upcoming monsoon session of the Assembly. Earlier this year, the Cabinet approved the abolition of the Act, and Thursday's meeting authorised the Repealing Bill required to implement this decision.

*—PTI*

# Sky is the limit for Sensex & Nifty

**MUMBAI, 18 JULY**

Stock markets remained on record-smashing course for the fourth straight day on Thursday with benchmark Sensex breaching the 81,000 mark for the first time and Nifty scaling the record 24,800 level driven by buying in IT, oil&gas and FMCG shares.

Rebounding from its early lows, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 626.91 points or 0.78 per cent to settle at a fresh closing high of 81,343.46. The index opened on a weak note and hit a low of 80,390.37 points in early trade.

However buying in IT shares TCS, Infosys and Tech Mahindra and index heavyweight Reliance Industries helped the index pare losses in the afternoon session. The barometer surged 806 points or 0.99 per cent to hit a new record intra-day peak of 81,522.55. The broader Nifty also pared early losses and climbed 187.85 points or 0.76 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,800.85. During the day, it zoomed 224.75 points or 0.91 per cent to hit a fresh lifetime high of 24,837.75.

Infosys gained 1.93 per cent ahead of the financial results for the June quarter.

*—PTI*

**PHOTO: PTI**

### Rupee closes at new low of 83.66

Rupee depreciated 6 paise and settled at its all-time low of 83.64 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as the strength of the American currency in the overseas market and overnight surge in crude oil prices weighed on investor sentiments. Forex traders expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak Asian as well as European currencies.

*—PTI*

**TO AVOID DELAYS**

# *Double toll for no FASTag on cars*

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

To deter National Highway users from deliberately not fixing FASTag on the windscreen of the vehicle, NHAI has issued guidelines to collect double user fee from such users entering the toll lane with non-affixed FASTag on the front windshield from the inside, an official release said on Thursday.

NHAI said deliberate non-affixation of FASTag on the windscreen leads to unnecessary delays at the toll plazas causing inconvenience to fellow National Highway users. "Detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) has been issued to all User Fee Collection Agencies and Concessionaires to charge double user fee in case of non-affixation of FASTag on the front windshield," it said.

the information will also be prominently displayed at all User Fee plazas, informing highway users about the penalties for non-compliance of entering a toll lane without a fixed FASTag on front windshield. In addition, the statement said CCTV footage with Vehicle Registration Number (VRN) at the fee plaza shall be recorded of the non-affixed FASTag cases. This will help in maintaining proper record regarding the fee charged and presence of the vehicle in the toll lane. In accordance with already established rules, the statement said NHAI aims to enforce the standard procedural guidelines for affixation of FASTag on the front windshield of the assigned vehicle from inside. *—PTI*

**PHOTO: PTI**

## Renowned cardiologist MS Valiathan dies at 90

**T'PURAM, 18 JULY**

Renowned cardiologist Dr MS Valiathan passed away at Manipal in Karnataka on Wednesday night, government sources said. He was 90. Valiathan was the founding director of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology in Thiruvananthapuram and the first Vice Chancellor of Manipal University. He was instrumental in developing low-cost prosthetic valves, disposable blood bags and oxygenators and integrated traditional and modern medical treatment systems. Leaders across the political spectrum condoled the demise of Valiathan, who is considered as one of the country's greatest cardiac surgeons. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said Valiathan was Kerala's greatest contribution to the world of medicine. "He was a popular doctor who pioneered the integration of traditional and modern medical treatment systems. Valyathan's efforts to study and research Ayurvedic medicine while having knowledge of modern medicine were. *—PTI*

## Court extends custody of actor Darshan till 1 Aug

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

A special court here on Thursday extended till 1 August the judicial custody of Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa along with his friend Pavithra Gowda, and 15 others in the Renukaswamy murder case. All the 17 accused, including Darshan and Pavithra, were produced before the magistrate through video conferencing from Bengaluru and Tumakuru prisons, where they are lodged, as their judicial custody ended today. The special public prosecutor argued that releasing the accused could hinder ongoing investigations, as more details needed to be collected. The prosecution highlighted alleged attempts by the accused to destroy technical, physical, and scientific evidence, demonstrating a disregard for the law. The prosecutor further disclosed the seizure of Rs 83.65 lakh in cash from the accused, and noted their use of multiple SIM cards registered under different names to contact various individuals before, during, and after the crime. According to police sources, 33-year-old Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor, had sent obscene messages to Gowda, which enraged Darshan, allegedly leading to his murder. His body was found near a stormwater drain next to an apartment in Sumanahalli here on 9 9 June. *—PTI*

## Court extends ED custody of Nagendra by 5 days

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

A special court here on Thursday extended by five days the Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody of former Karnataka Minister B Nagendra in connection with a money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation Ltd. The Ballari Rural Congress MLA was on Thursday produced before the court as his ED custody ended. He will now be in ED custody till 22 July. The ED arrested Nagendra on 12 July in connection with the case after questioning him. Nagendra, who was Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister, tendered his resignation on 6 June. The illegal money transfer issue, involving the Corporation, came to the fore, after its accounts superintendent, Chandrasekharan P killed himself on 26 May. He left behind a note claiming unauthorised transfer of Rs 187 crore belonging to the Corporation from its bank account; from that, Rs 88.62 crore was illegally moved to various accounts allegedly belonging to IT companies and a Hyderabad-based cooperative bank among others. *—PTI*

# Not a single black spot in my career: CM

### Siddaramaiah dismissed all allegations, blamed Valmiki corporation officials for bank staffer's death

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah replies to Opposition during Assembly session, in Vidhana Soudha, Bengaluru on Thursday; State BJP President BY Vijayendra protests at Freedom Park ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

The alleged financial irregularities in a state-run corporation created uproar in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, as the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah sought to rubbish allegations against him and his government stating that there has not been a single "black spot" in his political career spanning four decades.

Two days of uproar in the monsoon legislative Assembly session by Opposition over the alleged Maharishi Valmiki Corporation scam, the Opposition members interrupted Chief Minister's speech midway and staged a protest at the well of the House, accusing Congress government of spreading lies to cover up the scam.

Siddaramaiah dismissed the Opposition's allegations as baseless, claiming they were presenting the newspaper clippings to the house. He said, "Opposition has taken seven hours to lay out the flaws of this government and I am here confronting those allegations without any fear and as a Chief Minister I will punish whoever has done wrong and injustice. No matter how much you BJP speak about Dalits, you cannot be seen as pro-Dalits or SC/STs and BJP tactic is against social justice."

BJP legislators strongly objected to Chief Minister's statements, with senior party MLA CN Ashwath Narayan accusing Congress government and Siddaramaiah of being against social justice. Several BJP MLAs rose to defend their party and leader, leading to uproarious scenes in the House.

Correcting R Ashoka's allegation on the scam the Chief Minister said, "The death note written by the Chandrashekar only accused the union bank and Valmiki corporation officials are the reason for the death and he did not name any ministry."

With this statement the opposition walked out from the assembly and the session was adjourned for Friday by the speaker for the chief minister's response. *—Salar News*

## STATE SHUTS DOWN MALL FOR DENYING ENTRY TO FARMER

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

State government on Thursday ordered closure of a mall here for seven days after a farmer was denied entry owing to his attire, a 'dhoti' and a white shirt. The incident drew strong condemnation from members cutting across party lines in the Legislative Assembly.

The government also termed the alleged insult to the farmer as an infringement on "dignity and self-respect", and said it cannot be tolerated. "The government has the powers. Action will be taken against the mall immediately," Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh told House.

The incident happened on Tuesday when septuagenarian Fakeerappa from Haveri visited the mall with his wife and son to watch a movie. Assembly Speaker UT Khader asked the government to take action. BBMP's zonal commissioner Vinoth Priya said that the mall has not paid tax for 2023-24.

*—Salar News with Agencies*

**True story: Swapnil, Ather Cofounder and I had once gone to a restaurant in Bengaluru and were denied entry because of wearing slippers instead of shoes**

-Ganesh Sonawane, Frido Founder & CEO

BJP leaders protest outside Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Thursday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

## Oppn walks out from Assembly

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

Opposition BJP and JD(S) in Karnataka on Thursday staged a walkout from the Legislative Assembly in protest against the absence of Ministers in the House, which also saw Speaker UT Khader admonishing the ruling side stating that their behaviour is bringing a bad name to the government. As the House met for the day, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka and several senior BJP legislators pointed at the empty front rows of treasury benches, questioned the government, and asked Khader to take note of it. Opposition leaders demanded that the Speaker call out the names of the Ministers who are supposed to be present in Assembly. *—PTI*

**CM'S RESIGNATION SOUGHT**

## BJP leaders trying to lay siege to Vidhana Soudha detained

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

BJP leaders, including the party's unit President BY Vijayendra, were detained when they tried to lay siege to 'Vidhana Soudha' here on Thursday. They demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah over the alleged scam in the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation Ltd.

Holding placards, banners and posters, the BJP legislators and workers raised slogans against Congress charging it with indulging in large-scale corruption.

"The Chief Minister has lost the moral right to continue in office. Our protest will continue till he resigns," Vijayendra told reporters as he was taken into preventive custody near 'Vidhana Soudha', the seat of state legislature and secretariat, where the monsoon session was underway.

He also referred to the statement of Enforcement Directorate, which is probing the scam, on Wednesday that approximately Rs 90 crore was diverted from the state-run Corporation to 18 fake accounts in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. "A substantial amount of funds were utilised to procure a significant quantity of liquor just prior to the general elections. Additionally, high-end vehicles, including a Lamborghini, were purchased using proceeds of the scam," the federal probe agency said. *—PTI*

BJP supporters clash with cops detained during the protest against Congress at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Thursday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

## ED pressurising those held in Valmiki scam to name senior leaders

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

The ruling Congress in Karnataka on Thursday accused the BJP of using central agencies such as Enforcement Directorate (ED) to topple the State government by exerting pressure on those arrested in connection with the Valmiki Corporation scam to spell out names of senior leaders. Addressing a press conference, four ministers alleged that the ED is pressuring the accused in the Maharishi Valmiki scam to name Congress government ministers to knock down the government. Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda stated that the central government and ED has no intention to find the real culprits but they are planning to knock down top Congress leaders. The four ministers are Karnataka IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, Energy Minister KJ George said that since 2014, the number of cases registered by the ED has increased by 400 per cent. *—Salar News/ PTI*

## BJP warns Cong to be prepared for wrath over job quota bill

**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

Opposition BJP on Thursday warned Congress government to be prepared for the wrath of the people if it fails to table the bill that mandates reservations for Kannadigas in the private sector in the ongoing Legislative session.

The party slammed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for taking an U-turn on the Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, which was cleared in the Cabinet meeting on Monday and put on hold late Wednesday night after uproar by the industry. Clarifying on the decision to hold back the bill, Siddaramaiah said on Wednesday that the draft bill intended to provide reservations for Kannadigas in private sector companies, industries, and enterprises is still in the preparation stage.

A comprehensive discussion will be held in the next Cabinet meeting to make a final decision, he said.

BJP State President BY Vijayendra in a post on 'X' asked, "Why did you bring the bill to give employment to the kannadigas? Why did you hold it back? Why mess with the lives of Kannadigas? Do you need Kannadigas to insult?"

> A comprehensive discussion will be held in the next Cabinet meeting to make a final decision, he said

Vijayendra condemned the 'cowardly decision' of putting the bill on hold which 'insulted K a n n a d a - K a n n a d i g a - Karnataka'. The bill aims to provide employment to Kannadigas. It seems that the lobby of the anti-Karnataka forces, which suppress the self-respect of the country, the self-esteem of the Kannadigas, has prevailed over the Chief minister, Vijayendra alleged.

"Fearing the split in the INDI Alliance, Delhi's big 'hand' must have tied the hands of the chief minister, otherwise how can he take an escapist decision to sideline the bill that will improve the lives of Kannadigas?" he said. *—PTI*

**FROM BENGALURU TO PARIS**

## *City's canines to sniff out security threats at Olympics*

**MEGHANA PRASAD**
**BENGALURU, 18 JULY**

Tucked away in Bengaluru, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Dog Training and Breeding Centre (DBTS) is making a global impact as two of its Belgian Shepherd Malinois—Danbie, 3, and Vaste,5—are deployed in Paris, sniffing out explosives and ensuring security at the ongoing Olympics.

The dogs were born, groomed, and trained at the City centre, established in 2011 by CRPF DIG Vijaykumar IPS.

"This is the first time that dogs trained at the centre were sent outside India," Ravi S, Assistant Commandant of CRPF told **Salar News**.

He said Danbie and Vaste have received specialised training to handle crowded environments and were deployed in IPL matches in the City to ensure that they are well-prepared for the Olympics.

"Our primary focus is to train dogs to sniff out explosives, thereby saving countless lives," he added.

The programme is rigorous, starting when the pups are just 45 days old, and spans for 40 weeks. The dogs begin their training with obstacle courses, agility drills and scent detection at 5 am and undergo high-intensity exercise till 9.30am. The dogs' healthy diet includes a mix of commercial food, raw meat and home-cooked meals to maintain their health and stamina. Each dog is fed at least 1kg of meat twice a day.

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

The centre boasts an impressive record, training over 1,250 pups and deploying over 1,500 dogs across India.

They are deployed in strife-torn areas such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Jammu and Kashmir, and the Northeastern states to counter Naxal and terrorist threats. Dodamani Y, trainer and Inspector of General Duty, said the secret to the dogs' success is two handlers training each dog.

"This ensures that the dogs remain responsive and adaptable even if one handler retires. This dual-handler system is crucial for the dogs' effectiveness on the field," he said.

Ten dogs from Central Armed Police Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Sashsatra Seema Bal, Assam Rifles and Security Guard, National Security Guard and CRPF were sent to France, with their handlers receiving basic French language training for better communication.

"However, the dogs were not taught any commands in French as it may hinder their ability to follow new commands in such a short period," Dodamani added.

The trainer also added that the centre only takes breeds such as Belgian Shepherd Malinois and Dutch Shepherd as they are known for their intelligence, alertness, heightened senses and aggressive nature towards strangers.

Belgian Malinois Shepherd are used in search and rescue, bomb detection, and apprehending suspects as they have exceptional agility, a keen sense of smell and good focus.

The breed is considered one of the most aggressive as they have a bite force of 250 pounds per square inch, which can easily damage the strongest bone in the human body such as the femur. The decision to deploy CRPF dogs at the Olympics stemmed after the canines were used for the G20 Summit held in India.

The Paris Olympics will feature more than 10,000 athletes competing in 32 different sports. *—Salar News*

The programme for the dogs Danbie and Vaste is rigorous, starting when the pups are just 45 days old, and spans for 40 weeks. The dogs begin their training with obstacle courses, agility drills and scent detection at 5 am and undergo high-intensity exercise till 9.30 am ***PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT***

PHOTO: PTI

## Congress leaders detained during protest in Jammu

**JAMMU, 18 JULY**

Scores of Congress leaders were detained here on Thursday as the police foiled their attempt to 'gherao' the Raj Bhawan to protest the BJP-led Centre's alleged failure to curb terrorism and give all powers to the lieutenant governor ahead of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly polls. Hundreds of Congress workers led by AICC incharge Jammu and Kashmir affairs Bharat Singh Solanki, Pradesh Congress Committee president Vikar Rasool Wani and several other former ministers and ex-legislators came out of the party headquarters at Residency Road and began marching towards the Raj Bhawan. The protest marked the start of planned agitation by Congress to mobilise public support against rising terror incidents. *—PTI*

## Misri off to Bhutan in first trip abroad as foreign secy

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri will pay a two-day visit to Bhutan beginning Friday, in his first trip abroad after assuming charge of the top post. In Bhutanese capital Thimphu, Misri will meet Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Foreign Minister DN Dhungyel and Foreign Secretary Pema Choden among others, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said while announcing the visit. The foreign secretary's visit underscores the "highest priority" the government of India attaches to its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, it said. Misri will also receive an audience with Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Bhutanese Prime Minister had attended the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. *—PTI*

## ED raids premises of Haryana MLA in bank fraud case

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday searched the premises of Haryana Congress MLA Rao Dan Singh, a metal fabricating company and its promoters as part of a money laundering probe linked to an alleged Rs 1,392 crore worth bank loan fraud case, official sources said. About 15 locations, including those in Mahendragarh, Bahadurgarh and Gurugram in Haryana, Delhi and Jamshedpur in Jharkhand, were being searched by the central agency's Gurugram zonal office. A team of central armed police force personnel accompanied the search teams. It is alleged that Singh's family and his companies took loan money but never returned. *—PTI*

## Member of int'l terror module held in Punjab

**CHANDIGARH, 18 JULY**

In an intelligence-based operation, Punjab Police averted possible target killings with the arrest of a member of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI)-backed terror module, the police said on Thursday.The Director General of Police (DGP) of Punjab Police posted on X about a significant operation that averted potential target killings. The State Special Operation Cell (SSOC) in Amritsar arrested a member of a Babbar Khalsa International (BKI)-backed terror module, including operatives Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passia and Resham Singh. They were involved in illegal activities directed by their foreign handlers. The police recovered a pistol, two magazines, nine live bullets, and one empty bullet shell. Preliminary investigations have revealed that the accused were carrying out illegal activities. *—PTI*

# Now, YSRCP worker murdered in Andhra

### YSRCP calls it political murder, police denies

**PALNADU, 18 JULY**

A Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP)member was allegedly hacked to death in Andhra Pradesh's Palnadu district on Wednesday night.

The deceased was identified as Sheikh Rasheed, who worked as a cashier at a liquor store.

The accused was identified as Sheik Jilani, a worker of the ruling TDP.

Jilani, 25, hacked Rashid to death in the middle of a road at Mundlamuru bus station at Vinukonda in Palnadu district around 9 pm on Wednesday.

However, the local police noted that there 'was nothing political' in this incident but only personal enmity between the two.

The ruling TDP and Opposition YSRCP on Thursday accused each other over the party affiliation of the person who murdered a 25-year-old man in this district.

"There was no political issue. There were only personal issues between the two persons (Rashid and Jilani). Rumours are being circulated and some people are projecting it as a political murder," a police official told PTI on Thursday.

Reacting to the murder, former Andhra Pradesh chief minister and YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy alleged that a "demonic reign" is prevailing in the southern state, bereft of law and order. According to the opposition leader, Andhra Pradesh has turned into a den for murders, rapes, political vendetta and attacks in just 45 days of the new government assuming power. Rebutting Reddy, TDP claimed that Jilani was a follower of the YSRCP chief and called on the former chief minister to 'stop supporting' the murderer.

It asserted that Palnadu's superintendent of police had 'denied any political connection to the cold blooded murder' that took place in Vinukonda. *—PTI*

A CCTV footage shows Sheikh Jilani (L) attacking the victim Sheikh Rasheed (R) using a machete PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

- Ruling TDP and Opposition YSRCP on Thursday accused each other over the party affiliation of the person who murdered a 25-year-old man in this district

# AAP to go solo in Haryana, will contest all 90 Assembly seats

**CHANDIGARH, 18 JULY**

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday said it will contest all 90 assembly seats in Haryana, where people want "badlav" (change) and are looking at it with great hope. The AAP said it will announce party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal's guarantees on 20 July. The Haryana Assembly elections are due later this year.

Though AAP has contested multiple elections in Haryana, it has yet to taste electoral success.

AAP had contested the recent Lok Sabha elections in alliance with its INDIA bloc partner Congress. While the Congress won five of the nine Lok Sabha seats it contested, AAP unsuccessfully contested the Kurukshetra seat.

Singh targeted the BJP government in Haryana over the issues of unemployment, law and order, and the Agnipath scheme.

The Centre announced the Agnipath scheme in 2022. It provides for recruiting youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 for four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years. These recruits are called Agniveers.

Chief Minister Mann said during AAP leaders' visits to different parts of Haryana like Rohtak, Sonipat and Jind, people said they wanted "badlav" in the state.

Haryana gave chances to the Congress, the BJP and regional parties but all of them looted the state, he alleged. People want change and are looking at the AAP with great hope, he said.

Mann said the AAP will contest the assembly polls strongly and "Badlenge Haryana Ka Haal, Ab Layenge Kejriwal" will be its slogan. *—PTI*

AAP leader Sandeep Pathak with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Sanjay Singh in Chandigarh on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

Rahul Gandhi PHOTO: PTI

## One who eats beef shows lord Shiva's picture in Parl: BJP

**JAIPUR, 18 JULY**

In an apparent attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Rajasthan BJP Chief CP Joshi has said those who "consume beef" show picture of Lord Shiva in Parliament.

Joshi made the remarks at a party meeting in Dausa on Wednesday. A video of his speech has surfaced on social media.

"In the India-China fight, there is tension on the international border and Rahul Gandhi sits with the Chinese ambassador... One who consumes beef brings a picture of Mahadev to Parliament. This cannot be tolerated," Joshi said, without taking any names.

"If someone labels Hindus as terrorists, calls them violent, and opposes Ram Mandir, will we remain silent? Those who mock President Droupadi Murmu for her skin colour will continue to succeed if we remain a mute spectator," he said.

On 1 July, Gandhi, while speaking during the debate held up pictures of Lord Shiva, Guru Nanak and Jesus Christ as he referred to Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism to underline the importance of fearlessness. *—PTI*

# Bring 100 MLAs, form govt: Akhilesh Yadav

**LUCKNOW, 18 JULY**

Amid speculation of a rift in the Uttar Pradesh BJP, Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday, in a cryptic post on X, seemed to be asking ruling party MLAs to switch sides to form a new government in the state.

"Monsoon offer: Bring hundred, form government," the former chief minister said.

While Yadav did not name anyone in his post, a senior SP leader said on the condition of anonymity that it was a message for those in the BJP who were dissatisfied with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and wanted to cross over.

"The SP won 111 seats in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections and if we get the support of 100 dissatisfied BJP MLAs, then we will easily form the government," he explained. The speculation about the rift in BJP's state unit was fuelled by Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's post on X on Wednesday stating that the party is bigger than the government.

There has long been a buzz about less-than-warm relations between Maurya and Adityanath. In private conversations, a number of BJP leaders, including those who lost in the Lok Sabha polls, have been critical of the Yogi's working style and cited it as one of the reasons for their loss. *—PTI*

## Akhilesh slams order asking eateries to display owners' names

**LUCKNOW, 18 JULY**

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav said order asking eateries on the Kanwar Yatra route to display their owners' names is a "social crime" and asked the courts to take suo motu cognisance of the matter. "Such an order is a social crime aimed at spoiling harmony...," Yadav said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

## 26 HELD IN WB PROTESTS OVER POWER CUTS

**MANIKCHAK, 18 JULY**

Twenty-six people were detained in connection with a protest by locals over frequent power cuts turned violent in West Bengal's Malda district on Thursday, officials said.

Six people, including three police personnel, were injured.

When police went to clear the road for traffic, they refused to lift the blockade and started hurling stones at the personnel, SP Pradeep Kumar Yadav said.

The mob also vandalised police vehicles, he said.

In the face of the fury, the police team took shelter at a nearby house but when the mob was about to set it on fire, they fired one round in self-defence, Yadav said.

"There were several people in the house. To save those people and themselves, one round was fired in self-defence. Three villagers were injured," he said.

MoS for Irrigation Sabina Yeasmin, who is the MLA of Mothabari in Malda, said she did not support firing by the police and there would be an investigation into the circumstances leading to the violence. Meanwhile, Power Minister Aroop Biswas claimed. the allegations of frequent power cuts in the area are not true. *—PTI*

BJP MEET

Union Health Minister JP Nadda welcomes Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he arrives to meet party workers at BJP headquarters, in New Delhi on Thursday PHOTO: ANI

# Udhayanidhi likely to be annointed as DyCM

**CHENNAI, 18 JULY**

DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) party cadres and leaders want Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin's son Udhayanidhi to be elevated as deputy chief minister, a move which will be a "huge advantage" for the party in the 2026 assembly elections, a senior party leader said on Thursday.

DMK Organising Secretary RS Bharathi, however, made it clear that party president and Chief Minister Stalin will take the final call on the matter.

Bharathi's comments come amidst reports about the possible elevation of Udhayanidhi ahead of Stalin's proposed US visit next month.

Udhayanidhi was made Minister of Youth Welfare and Sports Development in his father's Cabinet in December 2022, a year after he won from the Chepauk-Thiruvallikeni Assembly constituency. He had played a crucial role in the 2021 Assembly election which ended the decade of AIADMK rule in the state.

His poll campaign displaying a brick to signify that the Centre had not initiated any work on the AIIMS project that was promised for Madurai, had a big impact in bolstering the party's winning prospects at the hustings. "Chief Minister Stalin has to decide on the elevation of Minister Udhayanidhi. This will definitely be announced when it happens," Bharathi said when asked about reports on Udhayanidhi being anointed as deputy to Stalin. *—PTI*

Udhayanidhi was made Minister of Youth Welfare and Sports Development in 2022 PHOTO: ANI

# BJP accuses Congress of inciteful words against PM

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

BJP on Thursday accused Opposition of often using remarks, which incite violence, against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said words like 'maut' and 'hinsa' should not be used in speeches to target political rivals.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Opposition should maintain decorum and seriousness in its political discourse as the use of such inciteful words have a psychological impact in society, promoting violence and raising unnecessary tensions.

"The choice of words is very important in public life," he said. The Minister and BJP Spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi cited a write-up of a former IPS officer to highlight that rhetoric used for short-term political benefits at times incites violence.

Trivedi referred to the killing of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe and the recent assassination attempt on Donald Trump to make the point. *—PTI*

# Cong raises demand for min wage of ₹400

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Flagging the issue of "decline in real wages", Congress on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been delivered a "stinging rebuke by voters" in his efforts to reach "400 paar" in the Lok Sabha but the Budget offers him the chance to achieve "Asli 400 paar" of a nationwide minimum wage of Rs 400 per day.

Congress General Secretary in-charge Communications Jairam Ramesh said multiple data sources, including the government's own official statistics, are unanimous in showing that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago.

"A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages (wages adjusted for price rise)," he said in a statement.

Citing the government data of labour bureau's wage rate index, Ramesh said real wages for labourers stagnated between 2014 and 2023, and in fact declined between 2019 and 2024.

He further cited data from Centre for Labour Research and Action to claim that real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF ASSEMBLY POLLS

# *EC allows Sena (UBT) to take public grants*

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday accepted the demand raised by the Shiv Sena (UBT) party to accept public contributions in view of the upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra.

Shiv Sena got split in 2022, after Chief Minister Eknath Shinde along with majority of MLAs left the party.

The party had requested the Commission to issue a communication/certificate recording the status of the party for the purpose of accepting voluntary contributions from public. A delegation of the party led by their General Secretary, Subhash Desai also met the Commission today at Nirvachan Sadan, New Delhi.

The ECI in its communication dated 18 July, has authorised the party to 'accept any amount of contribution voluntarily offered to it by any person or company other than a government company' in compliance under Section 29 B and Section 29C of the Representation of People Act, 1951, which governs the contribution to all political parties.

"It entails, special exemption under Section 13 A of the IT Act in which any income of a political party which is chargeable under the head "Income from house property" or "Income from other sources" or "Capital gains" or any income by way of voluntary contributions received by a political party from any person shall not be included in the total income of the previous year of such political party," the ECI said. *—PTI*

The party had requested the Commission to issue a communication or certificate recording the status of the party PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: ANI

## 'Wagh nakh' used by Shivaji Maharaj arrives in Mumbai

**MUMBAI, 17 JULY**

The 'wagh nakh' or tiger claw-shaped weapon used by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was brought to Mumbai from a London museum on Wednesday, state Culture Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar said. This wagh nakh will now be taken to Satara in western Maharashtra, where it will be displayed from 19 July. "The wagh nakh has landed," Mungantiwar told PTI in response to a question, but did not divulge any further details. State Excise Minister Shambhuraj Desai on Tuesday said the wagh nakh will be accorded a grand welcome in Satara. The weapon brought from London has a bulletproof cover and security has been beefed up, he told reporters. The weapon will be kept at a museum in Satara for seven months, he said. —*PTI*

## Int'l racket of SIM cards busted for cyber fraud; 3 held

**THANE, 18 JULY**

Thane police have busted an international racket of supplying SIM cards to fraudsters in places like Cambodia, Dubai and China for share trading fraud and other cyber crimes, officials said. Three persons have been arrested in this connection - two from Chhattisgarh and one from Delhi - and 779 pre-activated SIM cards were seized from them, Thane Deputy Commissioner of Police, Cybercrime and EOW, Parag Manere told reporters here on Wednesday. The police suspect that around 3,000 SIM cards have been put to use in a similar manner, he said. During a probe into 16 such cases registered in Maharashtra's Thane, the police also got a lead that these crimes were being committed through WhatsApp with the use of 30 mobile phones and nearly 2,600 SIM cards activated from Chhattisgarh, Tripura and other places. —*PTI*

## U'khand village snubs Dalits over drummer's no show

**GOPESHWAR, 18 JULY**

Dalit families of a remote village in Chamoli district were boycotted after a person from the community failed to turn up to play the drum at a temple due to illness. The boycott was announced on Sunday by the local panchayat of Subhai village, located in the Niti Valley, near the India-China border. There are about half a dozen scheduled caste families in the village which have been playing drums for generations at social, cultural, and religious festivals in the village. However, when one Pushkar Lal could not turn up to play the drum at a religious event due to sickness, the local panchayat ordered the entire community's social boycott.—*PTI*

## Mauritius gets 1st overseas Jan Aushadi Kendra

**PORT LOUIS, 18 JULY**

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has inaugurated India's first overseas Jan Aushadi Kendra in Mauritius, testifying the "close" bilateral cooperation, especially in the key health sector. Jaishankar was in Mauritius on a two-day visit from 16 to 17 June, one of the first countries he visited in his current term as External Affairs Minister. On Wednesday, he jointly inaugurated India's first overseas Jan Aushadi Kendra with Mauritian Prime Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, "testifying to the close cooperation between our countries, especially in the important sector of health," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. Jan Aushadhi Kendras have been set up to make affordable generic medicines available to all. Jaishankar and Prime Minister Jugnauth also inaugurated a modern medical facility built with Indian grant assistance in Grand Bois on Wednesday.—*PTI*

# Naxal attack: 2 cops killed, 4 hurt in IED blast in Ch'garh

## Jawans were attacked while returning from an operation

**BIJAPUR, 18 JULY**

Two personnel of the Special Task Force (STF) were killed and four others injured after Naxalites detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Thursday.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expressed grief over the incident and said the sacrifice of the jawans will not go in vain and the fight against Naxalism will continue till the menace is eradicated. The incident took place on Wednesday night in Tarrem area when a joint team of security personnel was returning after an anti-Naxalite operation in forests on the tri-junction of Bijapur-Sukma-Dantewada districts, a police official here said.

Personnel of the STF, District Reserve Guard - both state police units, Central Reserve Police Force and its elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action were involved in the operation, launched on Tuesday based on inputs about the presence of Naxalites belonging to their Darbha and west Bastar divisions and military company no.2, he said.

STF personnel being treated at a hospital, in Bijapur district, on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

"Two STF constables -- Bharat Sahu, resident of Raipur, and Satyer Singh Kange, of Narayanpur district -- were killed in the blast triggered by Naxalites while four other personnel sustained injuries," the official said.

Reinforcement was rushed to the area after the incident and the injured personnel were shifted to Bijapur district hospital, he said. The injured jawans will be airlifted to state capital Raipur for further medication, he added.

Sai in a post on X said, "Received the sad news about the martyrdom of 2 STF jawans and injury to 4 jawans in an IED blast carried out by Maoists in Tarrem area of Bijapur. I pray to God for the departed souls to rest in peace and for the speedy recovery of the injured jawans".

"Naxalites have become frustrated by the operations being carried out by the state government to eliminate the menace and are resorting to cowardly acts. The martyrdom of the jawans will not go in vain. Our fight will continue till the end of Maoism," he said. —*PTI*

**LAND DISPUTE CASE**

# Khedkar's mother sent to custody till tomorrow

**PUNE, 18 JULY**

A court in Maharashtra's Pune district on Thursday remanded Manorama Khedkar, mother of IAS probationer Puja Khedkar, in police custody till 20 July, in a case of allegedly threatening some people by brandishing a gun over a land dispute, officials said.

She was apprehended early morning from Mahad in Maharashtra's Raigad district, an official said.

Manorama Khedkar was hiding in a lodge at Hirkaniwadi in Mahad, according to the police.

After being apprehended, she was brought to the Paud police station in Pune district.

Police had launched a search for Manorama and her husband Dilip Khedkar after a video surfaced showing her allegedly threatening some people with a gun over a land dispute at Dhadwali village in Pune's Mulshi tehsil.

The Paud police in Pune rural have booked the Khedkar couple and five others under the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) sections, including 323 (dishonest or fraudulent removal or concealment of property), and relevant provisions of the Arms act.

Manorama Khedkar, mother of IAS probationer Puja Khedkar holding a gun *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Puja Khedkar is under scrutiny for her claims regarding disability and Other Backward Class (OBC) certificates in her Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) candidature, as well as her conduct during tenure at the Pune collector's office.

Amid the row, the government on Tuesday put on hold the 'district training programme' of Puja Khedkar, who was earlier transferred to Washim as a supernumerary assistant collector from Pune, as she was summoned back to the Mussoorie-based Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration for "necessary action". —*PTI*

# India asks its citizens in B'desh to avoid travel due to protests

**DHAKA, 18 JULY**

India on Thursday advised its citizens residing in Bangladesh to avoid travel and minimise their movement after ongoing protests demanding reforms in the quota system in government jobs turned violent and left at least six people dead across the country.

The violence prompted the government to close all public and private universities alongside schools and colleges across Bangladesh for an indefinite period on late Tuesday asking residential students to leave dormitories.

"In view of the ongoing situation in Bangladesh, the Indian community members and members and the Indian students residing in Bangladesh are advised to avoid travel and minimise their movement outside their living premises," the Indian High Commission here said in a statement. The mission also provided multiple 24-hour Emergency numbers for any assistance. There were approximately 7,000 Indians in Bangladesh, according to the high commission's website.

The clashes erupted on Monday as activists of ruling Awami League's student front confronted the protestors who insist the existing quota system was largely debarring the enrolment of meritorious students in government services. Demonstrators accused the ruling party's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League of attacking their "peaceful protests" with backing from police.

Fifty-six per cent of government jobs are reserved under the current quota system with 30 being for the descendants of the 1971 Liberation War freedom fighters, 10 per cent for backward administrative districts, 10 per cent for women, five per cent for ethnic minority groups and one per cent for the handicapped people. —*PTI*

Students clash over quota system at Jahangir Nagar University at Savar outside Dhaka, Bangladesh *PHOTO: AP/PTI*

## MUHARRAM: MAN HELD FOR WAVING PALESTINIAN FLAG

**DUMKA, 18 JULY**

The Jharkhand Police on Thursday said it arrested a 28-year-old man for allegedly waving a Palestinian flag during a Muharram procession in the state's Dumka district.

Another person was also detained in this connection. The police launched an investigation after videos purportedly showing some youths waving Palestinian flags during a Muharram procession in Dumka district went viral on social media on Wednesday. In one such video, a youth was seen waving the flags atop a vehicle and raising slogans during the Muharram procession at Dudhani Chowk. The incident occurred at Pandarpala locality in Wasseypur on Wednesday night. Police have imposed prohibitory orders under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita in the area to maintain the law and order situation, they said. Security has also been bolstered to prevent any untoward incident. —*PTI*

# India subject to unjustified pressure due to ties: Russia

**UNITED NATIONS, 18 JULY**

India is a great power that determines its national interests and chooses its partners, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, describing as "completely unjustified" the "enormous pressure" on New Delhi due to its energy cooperation with Moscow.

During a press conference here on Wednesday, Lavrov also termed as "insulting" Ukraine's remarks on the recent meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Moscow. "I think India is a great power that sets its own national interests, determines its own national interests, and chooses its own partners. And we know that India is being subject to enormous pressure, completely unjustified pressure in the international arena," Lavrov said. Lavrov was responding to a question about Modi's recent visit to Moscow and the opposition faced by India for its energy cooperation with Russia. With Russia presiding over the UN Security Council for the month of July, Lavrov is in New York to chair meetings of the Council being held under Moscow's presidency.

Modi paid an official visit to Russia on 8-9 July at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the 22 India – Russia Annual Summit. —*PTI*

# 2 judges take oath in SC with one from Manipur

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir High Court, Justice N Kotiswar Singh on Thursday took oath of office and became the first judge to have been elevated to the Supreme Court from Manipur.

Acting Chief Justice of Madras High Court R Mahadevan was also sworn in as judge of the apex court.

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud administered the oath of office to both judges at a function in the apex court premises. With the swearing-in, the top court has attained its full strength of 34 judges. The Supreme Court will function with 34 judges until Justice Hima Kohli retires on 1 September, followed by CJI Chandrachud, who superannuates on 10 November. On 11 July, the five-member collegium presided over by the CJI had recommended to the Centre the names of Singh and Mahadevan for elevation to the apex court.

Justice Singh was appointed as a judge of the Gauhati High Court in October 2011. Following the formation of the Manipur High Court, he was transferred there.

In February 2023, he was appointed as chief justice of the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh High Court and will demit office in February 2028 on attaining the age of 65 years.

While recommending Justice Mahadevan's name for elevation, the collegium had noted that he belongs to a backward community from Tamil Nadu and his appointment will bring diversity to the (SC) Bench. —*PTI*

**TEA GARDEN HORROR**

# Teen girl raped in WB, 7 held including 4 minors

**JALPAIGURI, 18 JULY**

A teenage girl was allegedly raped by seven people, including four minors, inside a tea garden in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, a senior police officer said on Thursday. The seven accused, named in the FIR by the girl's family, have been arrested in the last three days, the officer said. Four of the seven arrested were minors, he said. Among the three accused adults, two were remanded to police custody, while the other to judicial custody. The minors were sent to a juvenile home. The teenage girl had gone to a deserted spot inside the tea garden in the Dooars region at the request of one of the accused, stated to be her boyfriend, the officer said. When she reached the spot, she was raped by the seven on Sunday afternoon, he said, adding that the accused also videographed the act. After the purported video clip was circulated on social media by the accused earlier this week, the family lodged an FIR. —*PTI*

*PHOTO: PTI*

- The seven accused, named in the FIR by the girl's family, have been arrested in the last three days

The valuables will be stored into a temporary strong room *PHOTO: PTI*

# Ratna Bhandar opened at Puri for shifting valuables

**PURI, 18 JULY**

The Ratna Bhandar, the revered treasury of the 12th-century Jagannath temple in Puri, was reopened on Thursday for the second time in a week for shifting of valuables to a temporary strong room, officials said. The treasury was reopened at 9.51 vam, they said.

After offering prayers before Lord Jagannath and his siblings, the members of a supervisory committee set up by the Odisha government for the shifting of valuables from the Ratna Bhandar, entered the temple around 9am.

Speaking to media persons before entering the temple, the supervising committee's chairman and Orissa High Court former judge Justice Biswanath Rath said, "We sought the blessings of Lord Jagannath for smooth completion of shifting of all valuables stored inside the inner chamber of the treasury."

Last time, the treasury was opened on 14 July after 46 years. On that day, the ornaments and valuables of the outer chamber of the Ratna Bhandar were shifted to a strong room. —*PTI*

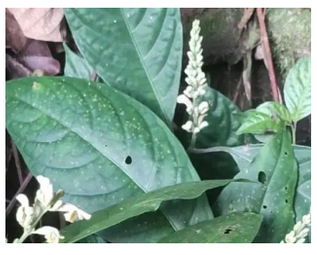
# Scientists discover new plant species in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, 18 JULY**

Researchers from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) have discovered a new plant species from a wildlife sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh, officials said.

'Phlogacanthus Sudhansusekharii', the plant species recently discovered from Itanagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Papum Pare district, belongs to the family 'Acanthaceae' and the 'Phlogacanthus' genus, they said. The species is named to honor Dr Sudhansu Sekhar Dash, a scientist at the BSI, for his "significant contribution" to plant and ecological research in the Indian Himalayan region, the BSI officials said.

The detailed research paper on the new species has been published by the authors Samrat Goswami and Rohan Maity in the Indian Journal of Forestry. The genus 'Phlogacanthus' comprises 13 species in India and is spread over mainly the northeastern and eastern Himalayan states, they said.



Phlogacanthus Sudhansusekharii *PHOTO: X/MYGOVARUNACHAL*

"The newly described species is closely allied to Phlogacanthus Guttatus (Wall) Nees, but differ in various morphological characters, mainly in its shape and size of calyx, staminodes and strikingly different corona colour," a BSI official said.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu has expressed delight over the development. "The biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh is wide & varied. —*PTI*

**350-FT FALL INTO GORGE**

# *Travel influencer dies while shooting reels*

**RAIGAD, 18 JULY**

A travel influencer died after falling into a gorge while shooting a video near the Kumbhe waterfalls in the Mangaon district of Raigad on 17 July, police said.

The deceased Aanvi Kamdar, 26, a resident of Mumbai, a travel influencer, was fond of shooting reels. She had gone to the waterfalls with her friends to enjoy the rainy season at the waterfalls. While taking photographs and videos of the waterfall, her leg slipped, and she fell straight into a 350-foot-deep gorge.

As soon as information about the incident was received, the Sahyadri Wildlife Conservation Society and Mangaon police officers reached the location, along with the rescue forces. Superintendent of Police Raigad, Somnath Gharge, said that the woman was alive after falling into the gorge and was rescued. However, during the treatment, she passed away.

Aanvi Kamdar fell straight into a 350-foot-deep gorge near Kumbhe waterfalls in Maharashtra on Thursday *PHOTO: INSTAGRAM*

"While descending to rescue the woman from the gorge, there were big stones falling on us. At first, it seemed like the woman was not alive. However, after going closer, she was breathing, which confirmed that she was alive. She was immediately taken to the hospital. However, she died during the treatment," Somnath Gharge said. The rescue operation was started after taking stock of the situation.

Suhas Diwas, the District Collector of Pune, appealed to the public to be careful of their visiting surroundings and to not go near any water bodies in the rainy weather. —*ANI*

**POD OF DEATH**

Switzerland introduced world's first portable suicide pod that will allow a person to die without the requirement of medical supervision by just clicking a button. The pod called Sarco is a 3D-printed capsule and was first unveiled in 2019. The pod fills the chamber with nitrogen and reduces oxygen levels gradually once button is pressed. The person will die within approximately 10 minutes

***PHOTO: X/@ZETACOMPA***

# Backlash against job quotas for locals in India's IT hub

The southern Indian state of Karnataka has paused a bill that mandated quotas for locals in private sector jobs after pushback from tech companies.

The state cabinet had approved the bill on Monday, triggering protests from top industrialists and opposition leaders.

The bill requires firms to reserve 70 per cent of non-management and 50% of management jobs for locals.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the bill would be reviewed in the next cabinet meeting before any decision was made.

The announcement came a day after he posted on X that the bill would reserve "100 per cent" of jobs for Kannadigas (natives who speak Karnataka's local language Kannada).

The post was widely shared on X and sparked criticism from business leaders. Siddaramaiah deleted his post after the state's Labour Minister Santosh S Lad clarified that jobs could be "outsourced" if skill sets were not available locally.

"But the government is trying to bring in a law to give preference to locally available skills," he said. In India, for a bill passed by a state to become a law, it has to be approved by the state's assembly and receive the governor's assent.

The new quota bill is is still some way away from these steps - and might even go back to the drawing board - but it has already triggered widespread outrage.

Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) city - which is the state's capital - is home to several top global information-technology (IT) firms like Google and Infosys, as well as start-ups. It also has many top IT and engineering colleges, making it the preferred destination for people looking to study or work in the tech sector.

Job seekers from all over India migrate to the city for work, making it one of the most cosmopolitan ones in India. But this has drawn outrage from some sections of the local population, who say that migrants are taking away their jobs. However, industrialists fear that the new bill will dent the secular image of the city and rob it of talent.

The announcement came a day after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah posted on X that the bill would reserve "100 per cent" of jobs for Kannadigas (natives who speak Karnataka's local language Kannada) ***PHOTO: X***

> **But the government is trying to bring in a law to give preference to locally available skills**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Karnataka Chief Minister

- It said in a statement that the new bill would hamper the growth of the tech industry, force companies to relocate and stifle the growth of start-ups. It also sought an urgent meeting with the state's authorities to discuss its concerns
- After years of protests calling for preference to be given to Kannada language in business establishments, the government in February passed a law mandating that 60 per cent of text on all signboards in the state should be in the local language

India's top technology association, the National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom), expressed its disappointment over the bill.

It said in a statement that the new bill would hamper the growth of the tech industry, force companies to relocate and stifle the growth of start-ups. It also sought an urgent meeting with the state's authorities to discuss its concerns.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, who heads one of India's top pharmaceutical companies - Biocon - which has its office in Bengaluru, also criticised the bill.

"As a tech hub we need skilled talent and whilst the aim is to provide jobs for locals, we must not affect our leading position in technology by this move," she posted on X and called for "caveats that exempt highly skilled recruitment from this policy".

This isn't the first time that laws seeking to benefit locals while targeting outsiders have faced criticism in the state.

After years of protests calling for preference to be given to Kannada language in business establishments, the government in February passed a law mandating that 60 per cent of text on all signboards in the state should be in the local language.

But after criticism from various sections, including businesses in Bengaluru where many people are fluent in English and don't speak the local language, the Karnataka High Court ordered the government not to take coercive action against establishments that didn't implement the rule.

*—BBC News*

**LETTERS** write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

# SALAR ساڈھ

## B'desh has been rocked by protests for nearly 3 weeks

Since 1 July, university students have been protesting across the country to demand the removal of quotas in government jobs after the High Court reinstated a rule that reserves nearly one-third of posts for the descendants of those who participated in the country's 1971 liberation movement.

Following the High Court's ruling in June, 56 percent of government jobs are now reserved for specific groups, including children and grandchildren of freedom fighters, women, and people from "backward districts".

Student protesters have clashed with police and members of Bangladesh Chhatra League, a student wing of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's governing Awami League party.

Six people have been killed and hundreds of others injured.

Who are leading the protests?

The demonstrations are notable not only for their size and intensity, but also their demographics.

"Look at who is protesting," Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center, told Al Jazeera.

"It's not just a case of grassroots demonstrations led by the poor. These are university students most of whom are above working class … The fact that you have so many students who are so angry speaks to the desperation of finding jobs. They may not be desperately poor, but they still need to find good, stable jobs."

About 67 percent of Bangladesh's 170 million people are aged 15-64 and more than a quarter are aged 15 and 29, according to the International Labour Organization.

"So you're looking at a situation where there's a significant working-age population," Kugelman said.

Vina Nadjibulla, vice president of research and strategy at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, said the South Asian country faces an "acute job crisis for university graduates".

"The 30 percent quota will hit that group," Nadjibulla told Al Jazeera, referring to the jobs reserved for

The protests stand out all the more because of the significant economic gains that Bangladesh has made in recent years.

The economy has grown at an average of 6.25 percent annually over the last two decades.

Poverty declined from 11.8 percent in 2010 to 5 percent in 2022 based on the international poverty line of $2.15 a day.

In the process, it also surpassed its much bigger neighbour India in terms of per capita gross domestic product (GDP).

Bangladesh has also seen a marked improvement in its human development outcomes and, as a result, is on track to graduate in 2026 from the United Nations List of Least Developed Nations.

Where is Bangladesh's economy falling short?

Despite those successes, "there is still a lot of inequality and poverty", with at least 37.7 million people reportedly experiencing food shortages last year, Nadjibulla said. "The growth is not trickling down to the educated university students who are taking to the streets," she said.

Kugelman said the country risks missing out on the opportunity to capitalise on its demographic dividend.

"That's the big issue. The stakes are particularly high," he told Al Jazeera.

Bangladesh's economic rise stems largely from readymade garments exports – predominantly to the West – and remittances from workers abroad.

"It is struggling to find a comparable" sector to RMG, said Kugelman.

"It needs ways to attract more FDI [foreign direct investments] to spark and sustain newer sectors. If you create more sectors and more diverse exports, jobs will follow."

Nadjibulla said the government needs to ensure there is appropriate education and training to match the needs of the workforce.

Last year, about 40 percent of Bangladeshis aged 15-24 were not working, studying or training. Nadjibulla said the efforts of global businesses to expand their supply chains beyond China could be an opportunity for Bangladesh. "That is where education reforms become critical," she said.

"What we are seeing right now is a complex interplay of government shortcomings, inequality and youth disenfranchisement and disenchantment with the government of Sheikh Hasina."

*—Al Jazeera*

Six people have been killed and hundreds of others injured ***PHOTO: PTI***



In Bangladesh poverty declined from 11.8 percent in 2010 to 5 per cent in 2022 based on the international poverty line of $2.15 a day ***PHOTO: PTI***

# *Joe Biden has Covid. Here's what someone over 80 can expect*

If US politics leading up to the 2024 presidential election was a Hollywood thriller, it would be a movie full of plot twists and surprises. The latest twist is President Joe Biden has Covid and is isolating at home.

Biden's doctor says his symptoms are mild and include a runny nose, cough and generally feeling unwell. His temperature, oxygen levels and respiratory rate are said to be normal.Biden, who has been diagnosed with Covid twice before, has received his Covid vaccine and booster shots, and has taken the first dose of the antiviral drug Paxlovid.

No doubt, Biden will be receiving the best of medical care. Yet, as much recent media coverage reminds us, he is 81 years old.

So let's look at what it means for an 81-year-old man to have Covid in 2024. Of course, Biden is not just any man, but we'll come to that later.

Even though Covid is still a disease that needs to be taken seriously but the threat Covid poses to an individual is far less now than it has ever been ***PHOTO: PTI/ FREEPIK***

> former UK prime minister Boris Johnson ended up in the ICU with his Covid infection in April 2020, despite being 55 at the time. That's a much younger age than Biden is now

**Luckily, it's not 2020**

If we were back in 2020, a Covid diagnosis at this age would have been a big deal.

This was a time before Covid vaccines, before specific Covid treatments and before we knew as much about Covid as we do today. Back then, being over 80 and being infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus (the virus that causes Covid) represented a significant threat to your health.

It was very clear early in the pandemic that your chances of getting severe disease and dying increased with age. The early data suggested that if you were over 80 and infected, you had about a 15% likelihood of dying from the illness.

Also, if you did develop severe disease, we didn't have a lot in the toolkit to deal with your infection.

Remember, former UK prime minister Boris Johnson ended up in the ICU with his Covid infection in April 2020, despite being 55 at the time. That's a much younger age than Biden is now.

Former US president Donald Trump also had what was understood to be a very severe case of Covid in October 2020. He was 74 at the time.

**How things have changed**

So let's wind the clock forward to 2024. A lot has happened in four years.

Covid is still a disease that needs to be taken seriously. And for some people with other health conditions (for instance, people with heart disease or diabetes) it poses more of a threat. And of course we know more about the well-publicised longer term effects of Covid.

But the threat Covid poses to an individual is far less now than it has ever been.

**More of us have some immunity**

First, most people have some immunity to Covid now, whether this has come from vaccination or prior infection, and for many both.

The fact that your immune system has had some exposure to the virus is transformative in how you respond to infection. Yes, there's the ongoing problem of waning immunity over time and the virus mutating meaning you need to have regular booster vaccines. But as your immune system has "seen" the virus before it allows it to respond more effectively. This means the threat posed by infection has fallen drastically. We know Biden has received his booster shots. Boosters have been shown to offer substantial protection against severe illness and death and are particularly important for older age groups.

**Now we have antivirals**

Second, we also have antiviral medicines, such as Paxlovid, which is effective in reducing the likelihood of severe illness from Covid if taken soon after developing symptoms.

In one study, if taken soon after infection, Paxlovid reduced the likelihood of severe illness or death by 89%. So it is highly recommended for those at higher risk of severe illness. As we know, Biden is taking Paxlovid.

Paxlovid has also been associated with rebound symptoms. This is when a person looks to have recovered from infection only to have symptoms reappear. Biden experienced this in 2022.

The good news is that even if this occurs in most instances the symptoms associated with the recurrence tend to be mild.

Biden would have the best care

The other factor of course is that Biden would have access to some of the world's best medical care.

If his symptoms were to become more severe or any complications were to develop, you can be assured he would get the best treatment.

So is Biden's diagnosis news? Well of course, given all the speculation about his health. But in terms of Covid being a major threat to Biden's health, there are no indications it should be. *—The Conversation*

PHOTO: PTI

## 19 bodies found in Nepal landslides

**KATHMANDU, 18 JULY**

Rescuers in Nepal have so far recovered 19 bodies, including that of four Indians, after two buses were swept into a swollen river following a landslide in the Chitwan district last week, sources here said on Thursday. The landslide happened in the Simaltal area along the Narayanghat-Mugling road in Chitwan district on Friday. Out of 54 people, three people swam to safety soon after the incident. Twenty-four people, including seven Indian nationals, were travelling on the first bus heading towards Kathmandu from Birgunj. Another bus heading to Gaur from Kathmandu was carrying 30 people. Out of 19 bodies, four corpses belong to Indian nationals, according to the Armed Police Force sources. *—PTI*

## Kenya bans protests over security concerns

**NAIROBI, 18 JULY**

Police in Kenya on Thursday have banned protests in the capital indefinitely citing a lack of leadership that would ensure peaceful protests. The ban was announced hours before a planned protest later Thursday, in which demonstrators were expected to march to the president's office calling for his resignation over poor governance. Acting police inspector general, Douglas Kanja, in a statement said the lack of leadership had "made it difficult to enforce safety protocols." Protesters were yet to be spotted Thursday but major roads leading to the president's office remained barricaded by the police. Kenya has seen a month of protests that started with calls for legislators to vote against a controversial finance bill. *—AP*

## Suspected arson attack in Nice kills 7 including kids

**NICE, 18 JULY**

Seven people have died, including three young children and a teenager, in a fire that broke out in the early hours of Thursday in the southern French city of Nice. The local prosecutor said officials were investigating the blaze as a potential arson attack. The mayor of Nice said they had images that clearly showed the fire had been caused petrol poured into a stairwell by hooded people during the night. Flames engulfed the upper floors of an apartment block in the Moulins area, close to the city's airport. Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin said three young children were among the victims and that police would "shed light on the circumstances of this terrible tragedy". *—PTI*

## N Korea launches trash balloons toward S Korea

**SEOUL, 18 JULY**

North Korea resumed flying balloons likely carrying trash toward South Korea on Thursday, the South's military said, days after it vowed to respond to what it called repeated South Korean civilian leafleting campaigns in the North South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that the balloons were flying north of Seoul, which is about an hour's drive from the border, on Thursday afternoon It warned the South Korea public to be cautious of falling objects and report to authorities if they spot balloons on the ground. In late May, North Korea has floated numerous balloons carrying wastepaper, scraps of cloth, cigarette butts and even manure toward South Korea, saying they were in response to South Korean activists sending political leaflets to the North via their own balloons. *—AP*

# China halts nuclear arms talks with US

### Beijing says the move was in retaliation to Washington's arms sales to Taiwan

**BEIJING, 18 JULY**

China has suspended negotiations on nuclear non-proliferation and arms control with the United States in protest against Washington's arms sales to the self-ruled island of Taiwan.

The US called Beijing's decision on Wednesday "unfortunate", while analysts said the move deals a potentially serious setback to global arms-control efforts.

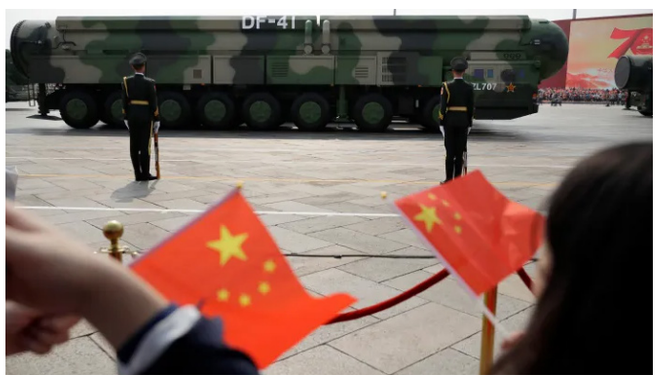
China and the US began nuclear weapons discussions in November as part of a bid to ease mistrust ahead of a summit between Presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden.

Further dialogue had not been publicly announced since, with a White House official in January urging Beijing to respond "to some of our more substantive ideas on risk reduction".

A spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday said the US's arms sales to Taiwan, a territory that it claims, had "seriously compromised the political atmosphere for continuing the arms-control consultations".

"Consequently, the Chinese side has decided to hold off discussion with the US on a new round of consultations on arms control and non-proliferation," Lin Jian, the spokesperson, told a regular news briefing in Beijing.

The US switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979 but has remained Taiwan's most important partner and biggest arms supplier, sparking repeated condemnations from China. *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*



China and the US began nuclear weapons discussions in November as part of a bid to ease mistrust PHOTO: PTI

### China accepts resignation of foreign minister

Chinese Communist Party (CPC) on Thursday accepted the resignation of sacked foreign minister Qin Gang from its Central Committee and endorsed the decision to expel former defence minister Li Shangfu and two other top Generals from the party. Qin, 58, disappeared suddenly in 2023 from public view after serving as China's shortest-serving foreign minister before being stripped of his titles. *—PTI*

## China to pursue Belt and Road projects in Nepal

**KATHMANDU/BEIJING, 18 JULY**

- In a message to Prime Minister of Nepal, Li extended congratulations to KP Sharma Oli on behalf of the Chinese government and on his own behalf

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Thursday expressed his desire to implement the understanding reached between the top leaders and the two countries in the past to collaborate under the China-Nepal Belt and Road Cooperation and also to promote collaboration in other areas to further promote bilateral ties.

In a message to the newly appointed Prime Minister of Nepal, Li extended hearty congratulations to KP Sharma Oli on behalf of the Chinese government and on his own behalf.

He also expressed his desire to implement the understanding reached between the top leaders and the two countries in the past to collaborate under the China-Nepal Belt and Road Cooperation and also to promote collaboration in other areas as well.

Nepal and China signed a memorandum of understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a flagship initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

*—PTI*

## ISOLATED TRIBE SPOTTED

Pictures of Mashco Piro tribe, a reclusive indigenous group in Peru's Amazon, surfaced on Wednesday. More than 50 members were recently spotted PHOTO: X/ @FREEDOM SQUARE NEWS

## B'desh ready to talk with quota activists

**DHAKA, 18 JULY**

The Bangladesh government on Thursday expressed willingness to hold talks with the students protesting against the quota system in jobs after fresh violence erupted across the country as they attempted to enforce a nationwide shutdown over the issue.

Authorities deployed Border Guard Bangladesh personnel across the country including the capital, to maintain law and order, the official BSS news agency reported.

Addressing a press conference, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government decided to sit in for a dialogue with protesting students and entrusted him and Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury with the task of the discussion.

He also said Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked the law minister to take the initiative to hold an early hearing of the quota-related case pending with the Supreme Court.

The government has decided to form a judicial probe committee led by High Court Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman to investigate the violence. *—PTI*

## 16 killed in fire at shopping mall in China

**BEIJING, 18 JULY**

At least 16 people were killed after a fire broke out at a shopping mall in southwest China's Sichuan Province.

The incident occurred on Wednesday around 6pm at the 14-story building, located in a high-tech zone in the city of Zigong, Sichuan province, according to Chinese state media.

Dramatic images and videos showed a huge column of black smoke billowing from the building. Several people were also seen gathered on a balcony.

The rescue operation was completed on Thursday. Around 75 people who were trapped inside the building were evacuated, the local fire department said.

According to the preliminary investigations, the fire was caused by construction work, the report added.

China's Ministry of Emergency Management and National Fire and Rescue Administration said it has dispatched a working team to investigate the incident.

Fire experts from across the country will also be sent to participate in the accident investigation, the Ministry said.

Meanwhile, China continues to witness major fire accidents despite the directives from President Xi Jinping to implement strict preventive measures for provincial governments. *—AP*

PHOTO: X

## Ex-N Korean envoy is new vice minister in S Korea

**SEOUL, 18 JULY**

South Korea's President on Thursday appointed a former North Korean diplomat as a vice minister, the highest-level government job for any of the thousands of North Koreans who have resettled in South Korea.

Tae Yongho was a minister of the North Korean Embassy in London when he defected to South Korea in 2016. Tae is the highest-ranking North Korean who has resettled in South Korea in recent years. He has said he did so because he didn't want his children to live "miserable" lives in North Korea and he fell into "despair" over leader Kim Jong Un's executions of officials and nuclear ambitions.

North Korea called him "human scum" and accused him of embezzling government money and committing other crimes. *—AP*

# Biden tests positive for Covid-19: White House

**MILWAUKEE, 18 JULY**

US President Joe Biden has tested positive for Covid-19, halting his campaign at a critical juncture in the presidential election when he was facing increasing pressure about his health and concerns about his viability as a candidate.

"I'm sick," Biden, 81, wrote on X.

Biden tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday, disrupting a key campaign event in Las Vegas meant to shore up support with Latino voters.

"He is vaccinated and boosted and he is experiencing mild symptoms, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

Biden has returned to his home in Delaware where he will self-isolate and will continue to carry out all of his duties fully during that time. The White House will provide regular updates on the president's status as he continues to carry out the full duties of the office while in isolation, she said. He was scheduled to speak at the Unidos event in Las Vegas on Wednesday. *—AP*

People wear bandages on their ears at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin PHOTO: X

## Vance vows to fight for working-class Americans

**MILWAUKEE, 18 JULY**

US Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance praised former president Donald Trump and promised to fight for working-class Americans "cast aside and forgotten" by the Democrats, as he made his debut at the Republican National Convention.

"When I was in the fourth grade, a career politician by the name of Joe Biden supported the North American Free Trade Agreement, a bad trade deal that sent countless good American manufacturing jobs to Mexico. And when I was a senior in high school, Joe Biden supported the disastrous invasion of Iraq," he said while addressing the convention. *—AP*

> **Although he's a meat and potatoes kind of guy, he adapted to my vegetarian diet and learned to cook food for my mother, Indian food**
>
> -Usha Vance, Republican VP nominee JD Vance's wife

### Trump gunman seen as threat before attack

**WASHINGTON DC, 18 JULY**

Donald Trump's would-be assassin was flagged as "suspicious" by the Secret Service up to an hour before he began shooting but was lost in the crowd. "13 July will be my premiere; watch as it unfolds," the assassin wrote on online platform Steam. Footages show the assassin's perfectly aimed headshot that might have claimed Trump's life if he didn't tilt his head. *—BBC News*

## US COP WHO LAUGHED AFTER INDIAN STUDENT'S DEATH FIRED

**NEW YORK, 18 JULY**

A Seattle police officer, whose insensitive comments and laughter following the death of an Indian student had caused outrage, has been fired.

Jaahnavi Kandula, 23, was struck by a police vehicle driven by Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave as she was crossing a street on 23 January. Dave was driving 74 mph (more than 119 kmh) on the way to a report of a drug overdose call.

Kandula was thrown 100 feet when she was struck by the speeding police patrol vehicle. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/@ARTVANDELAY

## STORIES FROM NATURE

Cambodia welcomed 60 baby Siamese crocodiles - a hatching record for the endangered species in this century; A large dinosaur's skeleton named Apex at a Sotheby's auction in New York City; Fisherman Alan Belucci, 48, inspects dead fish on the banks of the Piracicaba River PHOTO: Fauna & Flora/ EPA/ ALBERT CAHYADI

## Near-extinct crocodiles back in Cambodia

**PHNOM PENH, 18 JULY**

Cambodia has welcomed 60 baby Siamese crocodiles - a hatching record for the endangered species in this century, conservationists say.

They have called it a "real sign of hope", after more than 20 years of efforts to revive the reptile's numbers in the remote Cardamom Mountains. The olive green freshwater reptile has a distinct bony crest at the back of its head - by some estimates, it can grow up to 3m or nearly 10ft. Siamese crocodiles were once widespread throughout much of South East Asia. *—BBC News*

## Dinosaur skeleton fetches record $44.6M at auction

**NEW YORK, 18 JULY**

A large dinosaur's skeleton has fetched USD44.6million at a Sotheby's auction in New York City - the most ever paid for a fossil. The plant-eating stegosaurus - nicknamed Apex - is 11 feet tall and 27 feet long from nose to tail, and "ranks high among the most complete skeletons ever found", Sotheby's said.

Apex was discovered by chance by a palaeontologist in 2022 near the suitably named town of Dinosaur in the western US state of Colorado. The fossil exceeded its pre-sale estimates by more than 11 times, going "to applause after 15 minutes". *—BBC News*

## Tons of dead fish cover major river in Brazil

**TANQUA, 18 JULY**

Several tons of fish have died along one of the main rivers in Brazil's Sao Paulo state after an alleged illegal dumping of industrial waste. A preliminary analysis estimates that between 10 and 20 tons of fish died on the Piracicaba River in southeastern Brazil, Sao Paulo's prosecutors said in a statement. The initial investigation points to an "irregular discharge of wastewater" from Estiva's Sao Jose plant in the community of Rio das Pedras and it reached a stream that flows into the Piracicaba River, prosecutors said. *BBC News*

## Gold zooms for 6th day, surges ₹700 to ₹76.4K

MUMBAI, 18 JULY

Gold price surged by Rs 700 to Rs 76,400 per 10g in the local market here on Thursday on fresh domestic demand as well as depreciation in rupee. According to All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal prices had closed at Rs 75,700 per 10g in the previous session. Extending its gains for the sixth straight session, the precious metal jumped by Rs 700 to Rs 76,400 per 10g in the national capital. Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity zoomed by Rs 750 to Rs 76,100 per 10g. However, silver prices declined by Rs 400 to Rs 94,000 per kg from Rs 94,400 per kg in the previous session. Gold prices rose on account of sustained buying by local jewellers, the association said, adding weakness in the rupee also aided the rally in the yellow metal. Silver was also marginally up at USD 30.66 per ounce in New York. *—PTI*

## Tata, NHPC join hands for solar rooftops project

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL) has joined hands with state-owned NHPC Renewable Energy Ltd (NHPC-REL) for installation of rooftop solar projects on government buildings of central ministries, states, and union territories. This collaboration represents a major step forward in our shared vision of a sustainable and green energy future. By leveraging our combined strengths, we are confident in achieving our goal of 100 per cent solarisation by 2025," Deepesh Nanda, CEO & MD of TPREL said. This initiative will not only help us meet our solarisation targets but also contribute significantly to reducing the carbon footprint of government buildings," NHPC CMD RP Goyal said. An arm of Tata Power, TPREL is a developer of renewable energy projects including solar, wind, and storage systems. *—PTI*

## Aurobindo Pharma approves Rs 750cr share buyback plan

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Aurobindo Pharma on Thursday said its board has approved a share buyback plan of up to Rs 750 crore. The company's board has approved the buyback of up to 51,36,986 shares representing up to 0.88 per cent of the total paid-up equity share capital, Aurobindo Pharma said in a regulatory filing. The company will buy the shares at Rs 1,460 apiece for an aggregate amount of up to Rs 750 crore, it added. The drug firm said 30 July has been fixed as the record date for the Rs 750-crore share buyback scheme through the tender offer route.m At the end of June 30, the company promoters owned 51.8 per cent stake, while foreign institutional investors (FIIs) and mutual funds owned 16.73 per cent and 19.17 per cent respectively.*—PTI*

## Indian FinTech industry projected to reach $420B

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The Indian fintech industry is estimated to be around USD 110 billion in 2024 and its projected to reach about USD 420 billion by 2029, Ajay Kumar Choudhary, Non-Executive Chairman and Independent Director, National Payments Corporation of India, said. The sector, he said, is expected to continue to grow due to factors like favourable policies of the government. The government's push towards a digital economy, coupled with a young and tech-savvy population, is likely to propel the fintech sector to new heights, he added. "As of 2024, Indian FinTech Industry is estimated to be around USD 110 billion and by 2029, it is projected to reach an impressive number of around 420 billion at a cumulative annual growth rate of 31 per cent," industry chamber Assocham said in a statement, quoting Choudhary. *—PTI*

# Byju's knocks at NCLAT door against insolvency

### BCCI sues Byju's for non-payment of Rs 159 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Crisis-ridden Byju's has moved National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) against the recent order of NCLT that allowed cricket board BCCI's petition for initiating insolvency proceedings against the once-famed edtech company, sources said.

Sources privy to the development said that the company is seeking an urgent hearing on the matter.

Byju's did not comment on the issue.

According to sources, Byju's on Thursday moved the appellate tribunal, NCLAT, contesting the recent order of NCLT's Bengaluru bench that had admitted the cricket board's plea to start insolvency proceedings against the parent company Think and Learn, after the edtech firm failed to pay Rs 158.9 crore dues.

Founder and CEO Byju Raveendran will report to the resolution professional. NCLT has appointed Pankaj Srivastava as the interim resolution professional.

Byju's had previously sponsored the Indian cricket team.

Earlier this week, Byju's had said it is hopeful of reaching "an amicable settlement" with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

Founder Byju Raveendran's firm had earlier said it is hopeful of reaching an amicable settlement" with BCCI *PHOTO: PTI*

A Byju's spokesperson had said: "As we have always maintained, we wish to reach an amicable settlement with BCCI and we are confident that, despite this order, a settlement can be reached. In the meantime, our lawyers are reviewing the order and will take necessary steps to protect the company's interests." Byju's was once valued at USD 22 billion but reopening of schools after easing of pandemic restrictions led to its unravelling. BlackRock recently slashed its valuation of USD 1 billion.

The company's troubles began when it missed financial reporting deadlines two years ago and fell short of revenue projections by more than 50 per cent. NCLT invited creditors, employees and vendors to file claims against Byju's. At the heart of the dispute is the 'Team Sponsor Agreement' that BCCI and Byju's entered into on 25 July, 2019. According to this agreement, Byju's got the exclusive right to display its trademark/brand name on the kit of Indian cricket team, placing advertisements during telecast of cricket series, and hospitality and non-hospitality tickets for every ticketed match organised by BCCI, according to NCLT. *—PTI*

TO BOOST SAFETY

# Cyber experts seek security push in Budget

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

With India looking to embrace artificial intelligence rapidly, cybersecurity players expect that the upcoming Union Budget will include measures to boost safety of the country's digital space through further allocation of funds and incentives.

Innefu Labs, CEO and Co-founder Tarun Wig said the global focus on AI presents a critical juncture for India.

"The AI and ML (machine learning) models can be trained to identify and prevent 'zero-day' attacks. But this will require support from the government (in) nurturing and retaining top cyber talent, and empowering companies to invest in training AI models for cybersecurity," Wig said.

He added that while other nations are busy building their AI infrastructure, India must prioritise on optimum use of AI which could include training AI and ML models for improving our defence and intelligence posture, and to reduce cyber crimes which are on the rise, to identify money laundering networks or using AI to take governance

to the far flung villages of the country.

"Adding government support for research and development initiatives to proven companies in the private sector and not just academia would create a win-win situation. It would attract and retain talent while enabling companies, large and small, to innovate. This, in turn, would foster a digital environment that can support future advancements in AI and other emerging technologies," Wig said. *—PTI*

*PHOTO: PIXABAY*

## RECYCLING INDUSTRY DEMANDS ZERO DUTY ON ALUMINIUM

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Ahead of the budget, recycling industry body MRAI has urged the government to remove the import duty on aluminium scrap, saying it will help promote sustainability in the industry.

According to the Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI), the recycling process of aluminium scrap emits only 0.3 million tonnes (MT) of Co2 on per tonne of production compared to 14 tonnes of carbon emissions on the production of 1 MT of aluminium through smelters route which involves maintaining of coal-based capacities for power supply.

"Among the key challenges faced by the Indian aluminium recycling industry is 2.5 per cent import duty on aluminium scrap.," MRAI said in a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. *—PTI*

GRANT THORNTON REPORT

During the preceding January-March quarter, deals worth only USD 200 million were closed *PHOTO: PTI*

# Real estate sees deals worth USD 1.5B in April-June

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Indian real estate market saw deals worth USD 1.56 billion during April-June period, a jump of nearly eight-fold from the preceding quarter, according to Grant Thornton report.

In its report 'Real Estate/ REITs Dealtracker-Providing M&A and PE deal insights, consulting firm Grant Thornton Bharat mentioned that Indian real estate market witnessed 19 deals valued at USD 1.56 billion during the second quarter of this calendar year.

During the preceding January-March quarter, deals worth only USD 200 million were closed.

"In Q2 2024, the Indian real estate market have shown robust activity, with 19 deals totalling USD 1.6 billion.," said Shabala Shinde, Partner and Real Estate Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat.

The consultant noted that there has been a robust growth trajectory in overall deal activity, primarily driven by substantial increases in domestic transactions and private equity (PE) investments.

As per the report, the M&A (merger and acquisition) deals during the second quarter were valued at USD 123 million, as against USD 32 million in the preceding quarter.

The private equity deals jumped 8.5 times to USD 1,439 million in April-June 2024 from USD 168 million in the preceding quarter. *—PTI*

# Havells India Q1 net profit up 42% at ₹407.51 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 JUL

Havells India Ltd on Thursday reported a 42 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 407.51 crore in the first quarter ended 30 June, 2024 as a scorching summer led to robust sales growth.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 287.07 crore in the same quarter last fiscal, Havells India said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated revenue from operations in the first quarter stood at Rs 5,806.21 crore, as compared to Rs 4,833.8 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, the company said.

Total expenses in the quarter under review were higher at Rs 5,334.54 crore, as compared to Rs 4,516.59 crore in the year-ago period.

Electrical consumer durables segment clocked revenue of Rs 1,055.42 crore in the first quarter of this financial year, up from Rs 877.52 crore in the same period a year ago.

Revenue from Lloyd brand of consumer products stood at Rs 1,928.72 crore, as against Rs 1,310.92 crore in the same period last fiscal, the company said.

The cables business segment clocked revenue of Rs 1,521.24 crore in the quarter under review. *—PTI*

## WIPRO HOLDINGS UK TRANSFERS ENTIRE STAKE TO IT SERVICES

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Wipro Holdings (UK) has transferred its entire shareholding in Wipro Financial Outsourcing Services Ltd to Wipro IT Services UK Societas, as part of efforts to rationalise and simplify the overall group structure, according to a regulatory filing. With this, Wipro IT Services UK Societas will hold 100 per cent stake in Wipro Financial Outsourcing Services.

The transaction has been undertaken with the intention to rationalise and simplify the overall group structure. *—PTI*

# Toshiba to invest 10B yen in India to expand capacity

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Toshiba Group on Thursday said it will invest 10 billion Japanese yen (over Rs 500 crore) to increase the capacity of producing power transmission and distribution equipment in India.

Toshiba Transmission & Distribution Systems (India) Pvt Ltd (TTDI) will increase its capacity of manufacturing power transformers and distribution transformers by about 1.5 times compared to FY2023, over a three-year period from FY2024 to FY2026, it stated.

Toshiba Group has positioned power T&D as a focus business and will invest about JPY 10 billion (over Rs 500 crore) in TTDI to expand its capacity.

With this investment, TTDI will increase its assembly and test line capacity for distribution transformers and power transformers for the transmis-

*PHOTO: PIXABAY*

sion grids and distribution networks.

Enhanced testing capacity for power transformers will represent a significant upgrade, specifically geared towards expanding exports as well as meeting the high demand for 400kV/765kV transformers in the Indian market.

Besides, TTDI will also build a new manufacturing facility for surge arresters during the first half of FY24 and the products will be commercially available in the market by the second half of the year. *—PTI*

## EXPORTS WILL BOOST INDIA AND RUSSIA TRADE: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Steps such as increasing exports, making local currency trading workable and a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union will help boost trade between India and Russia, think tank GTRI said on Thursday.

India should not worry over the trade deficit, as it is getting crude petroleum oil at cheaper than market rates from Russia and it is also cutting India's overall oil import bill, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

Since the Ukraine war began in February 2022 and the US imposed sanctions on Russia, the trade relationship between India and Russia has shifted significantly.

There has been a sharp increase in imports from Russia, resulting in a notable trade imbalance. *—PTI*

# US Envoy visits Adani's Khavda project site

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti visited Adani group's Khavda renewable energy project - the largest in the world, in fresh signs of the conglomerate having moved past Hindenburg attack and winning new backing.

Adani Green Energy Ltd is developing the world's largest renewable energy project of 30,000 MW on barren land at Khavda in Kutch, Gujarat. Built across 538sq km, it is five times the size of Paris and almost as large as Mumbai. AGEL has operationalised 2,000 MW cumulative solar capacity or 6 per cent of the planned 30,000 MW, within 12 months of commencing work and the entire project is to be completed by 2030.

The visit and making it public is being seen as a sign of confidence the US government has in India's largest infrastructure conglomerate.

This came months after US short-seller Hindenburg Research alleged corporate fraud and stock manipulation at Adani Group. Adani Group

Eric Garcetti *PHOTO: PTI*

- Adani Green Energy Ltd is developing the world's largest renewable energy project of 30,000 MW on barren land at Khavda in Kutch, Gujarat.

has repeatedly denied all allegations and has scripted a comeback story with most of its listed companies erasing losses that the Hindenburg report induced.

Adani Group has been instrumental in India's strategic infrastructure initiatives, particularly outside its borders, where it competes directly with China's extensive 'String of Pearls' and 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). *—PTI*

## HOUSING PRICES IN 30 CITIES ROSE BY 94%: PROPEQUITY

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Housing prices in top 30 Tier II markets have risen by up to 94 per cent in the last four years on high demand for residential properties, according to real estate data analytic firm PropEquity.

The data relates to primary residential markets of the 30 markets.

PropEquity, which is listed on stock exchanges, has compared the average launch price of projects during 2023-24 fiscal year as against the rates during 2019-20.

The 30 markets are Amritsar, Mohali, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Panipat, Dehradun, Bhiwadi, Sonepat, Jaipur, Agra, Lucknow, Bhopal, Indore, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Guntur, Mangalore, Mysore, Coimbatore, Kochi, Trivandrum, Raipur, Bhubaneshwar, Ahmedabad, Gandhi Nagar, Vadodara, Surat, Nashik, Nagpur and Goa. *—PTI*

CYBER-ATTACKS

# *Crypto firm loses Rs 1.9K cr after breach*

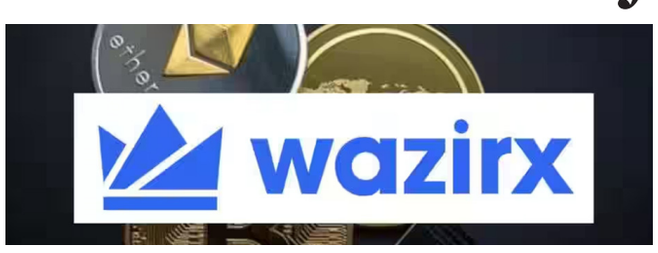
NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Indian crypto exchange WazirX on Thursday experienced a security breach on one of its wallets, reportedly resulting in the transfer of about Rs 1,923 croreto a different address.

WazirX confirmed the security breach on the platform. The firm has temporarily paused customer withdrawals. The exploits targeted the exchange's multisig wallet, the exchange confirmed.

Multisig wallets require two or more private keys to authorise and confirm transactions before processing.

Over $100 million in Shiba




WazirX confirmed the security breach on the platform. The firm has temporarily paused customer withdrawals *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Inu (SHIB) was stolen by the hacker along with 20 million MATIC tokens ($11 million), 640 billion PEPE tokens ($7.5 million), 5.7 million USDT, and 135 million GALA ($3.5 million), on-chain data shows.

Transactional data indicates that the exploiter is actively selling the stolen assets on the on-chain exchange Uniswap. Although the exploiter has not yet sold their ETH holdings, they currently possess over $4.2 million in FLOKI tokens.

The security breach comes months after the finance ministry issued show-cause notices to nine offshore virtual digital assets service providers dealing with crypto assets.

The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) under the finance ministry in December last year issued the show-cause notices to VDA platforms like Binance, the largest cryptocurrency exchange, and Kucoin for non-compliance with anti-money laundering law and requested the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to block their websites. *—Agencies*

INDIA'S FINANCIAL SERVICES JOB GAP

At a time when the country is grappling with unemployment, an official at Financial Planning Standards Board said the financial sector has lakhs of jobs but no qualified takers.

Here is a breakdown of vacancies in the financial sector:

- Vacancies: 18 lakh .
- Jobs created in 2023: 46.86 lakh
- People hired: 27.5 lakh
- Shortage of trained personnel: 40 times more job vacancies than professionals available
- In 2024, India has 2,731 professionals against 2.23 lakh worldwide
- By 2030, India needs 1,00,000 professionals but will have only 10,000

**Jobs are there, but people are not capable enough to take them up**

-Krishan Mishra, FPSB India CEO

Financial Planning Standards Board Ltd (FPSB Ltd) is the global standards-setting body for the financial planning profession

# Eye in the sky: Surya to lead India in T20Is; Rohit, Kohli to play ODIs

## Suryakumar's first assignment is the three T20Is in Sri Lanka

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Suryakumar Yadav has been confirmed as India's new T20I captain, ahead of Hardik Pandya who was the vice-captain of the squad that won the 2024 T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies in June.

Suryakumar's first assignment is the three T20Is in Sri Lanka on July 27, 28, and 30, which is also the first assignment of India's new coach Gautam Gambhir. It's also seen as the first step towards building for the next T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka in 2026. While Hardik is part of the T20I squad, Shubman Gill has been named vice-captain.

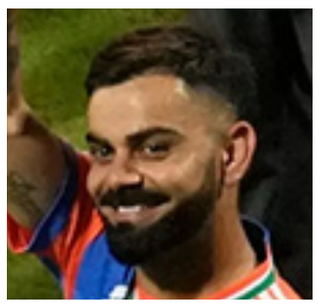
The need for a new captain arose following Rohit Sharma's retirement from T20Is after winning the World Cup. Though Hardik was Rohit's deputy at the T20 World Cup and is a more experienced captain - he has led India in three ODIs and 16 T20Is, apart from leading Gujarat Titans and Mumbai Indians in the IPL - it is understood fitness concerns and workload management may have been factors in the decision taken by the selection panel led by Ajit Agarkar.

Suryakumar Yadav PHOTO: PTI

Hardik had suffered an ankle Suryakumar, meanwhile, has captained the Mumbai state team in the domestic circuit. More recently, he led India to a 4-1 win over Australia in a T20I series last November, followed by a 1-1 series draw in South Africa.

Suryakumar was not named in the ODI squad for the Sri Lanka tour, while Hardik, too, is taking a break from 50-over internationals.

Both Rohit and Kohli have spent time abroad with their families after the T20 World Cup felicitation event in



Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai on July 4. There was speculation they would skip the tour of Sri Lanka and only return for the start of the home season in September, but they are now part of the 15-man squad for the series.

India's tour of Sri Lanka is the first assignment for new coach Gautam Gambhir, who was appointed after Rahul Dravid's tenure ended with the 2024 T20 World Cup. The tour begins with three T20Is in Pallekele on July 27, 28, and 30, followed by three ODIs in Colombo on August 2, 4, and 7.

India squad for Sri Lanka ODIs

Rohit Sharma (capt), Shubman Gill (vice-capt), Virat Kohli, KL Rahul (wk), Rishabh Pant (wk), Shreyas Iyer, Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Siraj, Washington Sundar, Arshdeep Singh, Riyan Parag, Axar Patel, Khaleel Ahmed, Harshit Rana.

India squad for Sri Lanka T20Is

Suryakumar Yadav (capt), Shubman Gill (vice-capt), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh, Riyan Parag, Rishabh Pant (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Arshdeep Singh, Khaleel Ahmed, Mohammed Siraj.

*—PTI*

India Women skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (4th L) with other skippers of participating nations poses for photographs ahead of the Women's Asia Cup T20 tournament PHOTO: PTI

# India to begin Women's AC defence with Pak

**DAMBULLA, 18 JULY**

The Women's Asia Cup is set for a blockbuster start when defending champions India take on arch-foes Pakistan in a prime-time clash here on Friday, with the eight competing teams hoping to firm up their combinations ahead of the T20 World Cup in October.

Harmanpreet Kaur's India are the team to beat going into this iteration of the Asia Cup, having won the competition three out of four times in the T20 version and each of the four times in 50-overs format.

Additionally, India is also the most successful team in the Women's Asia Cup T20 with 17 wins in 20 matches. They beat Bangladesh in the final of the last edition in 2022.

India's record against Pakistan has also been stellar in the shortest format with 11 wins against three defeats in 14 matches so far and Kaur's team will lean on it in addition to the rich form shown in recent outings to clinch the Group A clash here.

While India is coming off a 1-1 draw against South Africa earlier this month with the second of the three T20Is being washed out, Pakistan will be short on game-time as well as confidence since their last outing was in England in May when the hosts blanked them 3-0.

*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## I am going all-out to win gold in Paris: PV Sindhu

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Badminton ace PV Sindhu says she is "going all-out" in her quest to become the first Indian to win an unprecedented third individual Olympic medal in Paris, drawing on her experience from a successful past. Sindhu stands on the brink of history as she pursues the gold medal in the upcoming Games, having won silver and bronze in the 2016 Rio and 2020 Tokyo editions respectively.In an exclusive conversation on JioCinema's 'The Dreamers,' Sindhu spoke about her unwavering focus on making history in Paris, though it is going to be an extremely difficult task for the Indian star."That third medal at Paris motivates me, and I am going all-out to get that gold medal. For me, the Olympics is where I give my 200%," Sindhu said."The journeys in 2016 and 2020 were wonderful, filled with immense effort and unforgettable moments."As I prepare for Paris 2024, it's a fresh start, and I have to give my 100% no matter what."*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Devi Priya scores six goals as Manipur beat Assam

**KOLKATA, 18 JULY**

Manipur Hockey powered to a 12-0 win against Assam Hockey with Devi Mutum Priya leading the scoring efforts by pumping in six goals in the 2nd Hockey India Junior Men & Women East Zone Championship here on Thursday.Besides Devi, who scored in the 2nd, 4th, 7th, 26th, 36th and 59th minute, the other goal-scorers in the match were Reena Koijam (20), Tanu Shorensangbam (32, 57), Chanu Leishangthem Natali (42, 58) and Devi Laishram Ritu (51). In another women's match, Hockey Jharkhand crushed Hockey Bihar 10-0 with Mundu Sukarmani (15, 23, 43) emerging as the highest goal-scorer. Roshni Aind (6, 32), Kumari Shanti (19, 35), captain Rajni Kerketta (22, 59) and Salomi Nag (28) too were on target.Shanti Horo (27) broke the deadlock for Hockey Bengal. A penalty-corner conversion from captain Subila Tirkey (33) and a field goal from Laltlanchhungi (49) sealed the deal for Hockey Bengal.*—PTI*

# Swimmer Srihari Nataraj eyes semifinals in Paris Olympics

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Standing on the 2023 National Games podium adorned with 10 medals, eight of them gold, ace Indian swimmer Srihari Nataraj was utterly exhausted.

After all, he had been competing non-stop at major events since 2017 when he was just 16, and the relentless competitive grind, coupled with the rigors of training had finally taken a toll on his body.

"I just needed time off to rest because my 2023 season was crazy and so hectic with so many races. I think if I didn't take any time off, my body would have broken down by now," Nataraj told PTI in an interview. "And it could have led to an injury or I would have lost the drive to train. My body was under so much stress. I kind of just needed a few weeks off just to let my body rest," he added.

Refreshed after the much-needed break, the 23-year-old is ready for his second Olympics, where he will compete in the 100m backstroke event.

Nataraj qualified for the Paris Games via the Universality Quota, which allows countries to recommend their two highest-ranked swimmers for the showpiece if no one cuts through the regulation process.

Having secured direct qualification for the previous Tokyo Olympics, the entry to the Paris Games through the Universality Quota was not ideal for Nataraj's admission. But he has opted not to dwell on the disappointment.

"It was annoying and disappointing that I didn't get the qualifying time because I had been training well. But I'm not bothered about what happened," he asserted.

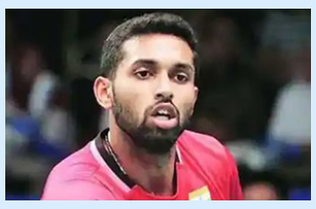
Srihari Nataraj PHOTO: PTI

"I got the quota spot. It might be a step back, but I still got the spot. And now I can spend the coming weeks either thinking 'Oh, this is not the way I wanted it'. Or I can focus on what I want to do in Paris. So, I'm taking it as motivation."

Since returning from the break, Nataraj has been training better, which resulted in two silver medals at the Mare Nostrum meet in Spain and France in May. *—PTI*

## Ravaged but resolute Prannoy focussed on increasing speed ahead of Olympics

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**



H S Prannoy PHOTO: PTI

His body has been ravaged by a spate of illnesses, the most recent being a bout of chikungunya, but seasoned Indian badminton player H S Prannoy is unwilling to let it come in the way of a dream Olympic debut that is happening a tad late in his career. He is focused on building his stamina for the grind that awaits him in Paris later this month and helping him is his coach and former player RMV Gurusaidutt. The 32-year-old Kerala shuttler, a 2022 Thomas Cup title winner and a world and Asian Games bronze-medallist has battled past a chronic stomach disorder, a nagging back injury, and more recently a week-long bout of the mosquito-borne viral disease. "The preparations that we started after the Australia Open, those are on point, we are on the right track," Gurusaidutt told PTI. "The best thing about Prannoy in this entire journey is that though he was struggling, he was showing up for training and giving his best. Of course now, since he had another rough patch, it is not easy to get into the winning momentum," he explained. But Gurusaidutt is confident nonetheless and does not feel that the latest illness will trigger "too many changes" in Prannoy's training routine. *—PTI*

FIFA RANKINGS

# India remains in 124th position

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Success-starved India held on to the 124th position in the FIFA men's rankings released on Thursday, even as reigning world champions and Copa America winners Argentina strengthened their grip at the top of the pecking order.

In the FIFA rankings released in June, the Indian men's national football team dropped down three places in the list after it failed to qualify for the third round of the 2026 World Cup Qualifiers after losses to Qatar and Afghanistan.

Since December last year, India has been sliding down. They had broken into the top 100 last year, with a best ranking of 99, but since then it has been a downward spiral.

In Asia, India remained in the 22nd position, behind the likes of Lebanon, Palestine, and Vietnam.

Having successfully defended their Copa América crown, Argentina (1st) tightened their grip at the top of the table.

PHOTO: INDIAN FOOTBALL

France (2nd) remained their closest challengers, after reaching the semi-finals of EURO 2024. Newly crowned European champions Spain (3rd, up 5) have yet more reason to celebrate after hauling themselves into the top three of the ranking, while beaten finalists England (4th, up 1) were just behind the leading pack, having leapfrogged Brazil (5th, down 1). Belgium (6th, down 3) now finds themselves outside the top five, with the Netherlands (7th) and Portugal (8th, down 2) just behind them.

Colombia (9th, up 3) may find solace in their creditable return to the top 10 despite a narrow defeat to the Albiceleste in the Copa América final.

*—PTI*

# Kevin to leave Haas at end of 2024 Formula 1 season

**DUBAI, 18 JULY**

Kevin Magnussen will leave Haas at the end of the season, the team confirmed on Thursday. Magnussen is Haas' longest-serving driver, racing with the team from 2017 until 2020 and then again since his F1 comeback in 2022.

Haas has already signed Ferrari junior Oliver Bearman to one 2025 seat, and ESPN sources indicate the team is close to securing Esteban Ocon, who will leave Alpine at the end of the season.

Magnussen's options for extending his F1 career appear limited -- as with most others, he may well be waiting until Carlos Sainz decides his next move before his future becomes more clear.

That Sainz situation also appears to be stalling Ocon's move to Haas as drivers keep contingency plans open. News on Ocon is not expected this weekend. As well as his long stint with the team, Magnussen also scored Haas' only pole position at the 2022 Brazilian Grand Prix. Haas boss Aayo Komatsu praised Magnussen for his contribution to the team over the years. *—PTI*

Kevin Magnussen PHOTO: X / TWITTER/@F1

## Odisha FC pitted against Jordan

**NEW DELHI, 18 JULY**

Indian club Odisha FC were drawn alongside Etihad Club (Jordan) and Lion City Sailors FC (Singapore) in Group B of the preliminary stage of the 2024-25 AFC Women's Champions League, following the draw conducted in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday.

Odisha FC, the champions of the 2023-24 Indian Women's League, will travel to Jordan to play in the preliminary stage, which will be held in a centralized league format from 25 to 31 August.

Thirteen sides will contest the preliminary stage, which features four groups – one group of four teams and three groups of three.

*—PTI*

RACIST CHANT

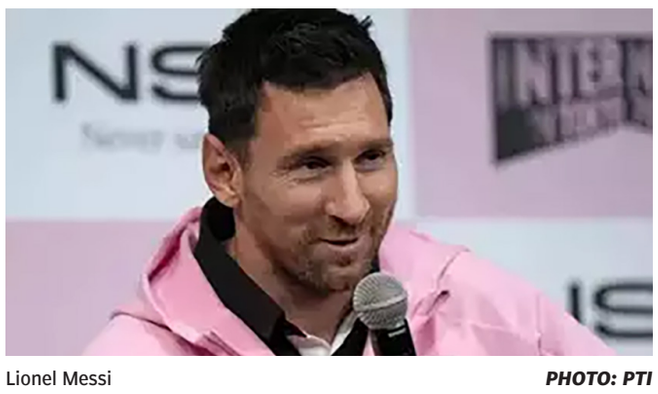
# *Messi asked to apologise for Argentina players*

**PARIS, 18 JULY**

Lionel Messi faced calls to apologize for racist chants made by Argentina's players after they won the Copa America.

An Argentinean government official said Messi, who is the team captain, and the president of the country's soccer federation, Claudio Tapia, should apologize after a video was shared on social media showing members of Argentina's triumphant squad singing a racist chant about French players with African heritage.

Midfielder Enzo Fernandez said he was truly sorry for the incident and his Premier League club Chelsea said it had begun disciplinary action, describing discriminatory behavior as completely unacceptable.It is unclear from the video if Messi widely regarded as one of the greatest soccer players of all time participated in the chant. But Argentina's sports sub-secretary, Julio Garro, said he should say sorry.The national team captain must also come out to apologize for this case.



Lionel Messi PHOTO: PTI

The same AFA (Argentina Football Association) president," Garro said in radio statements. I think it is appropriate. It leaves us as a country in a bad position, with so much glory.Argentina beat Colombia 1-0 on Sunday at Miami Gardens, Florida. Afterward, a video posted on Instagram showed Fernandez and Argentina players chanting about France's team as they celebrated.

The same chants by some Argentina fans emerged before the team beat France in the World Cup final in 2022. The derogatory chants single out France players of African heritage, from several countries, and holding a French passport. FIFA said it was also looking into the incident after the French soccer federation pledged to file a complaint with the sport's world governing body over racist and discriminatory remarks. Chelsea's response comes after one of Fernandez's clubmates, France defender Fofana, posted the video on his social media accounts Tuesday and called it uninhibited racism.Fofana has family ties to Ivory Coast and is among several French players who are Black in the Chelsea first-team squad. *—PTI*

# Spanish court gives Vinícius 8-month suspended sentence

**MADRID, 18 JULY**

Real Madrid said Wednesday that a Spanish court has given a suspended eight-month prison sentence to a person who racially insulted soccer stars Vinícius Júnior and Antonio Rudiger in the comments section of a popular Spanish sports news website.

The club said that the offender, whose name was not given, was found guilty of harming the moral integrity of the players, both of whom are Black. The person also reportedly used hateful language to denigrate Rudiger's Islamic faith.

The club said the offender avoided prison after agreeing to participate in an anti-discrimination awareness program. Madrid said the comments appeared on the Marca website.

In June, three Valencia fans were handed eight-month prison sentences after pleading guilty to racially insulting Vinícius during a Spanish league game in May 2023. That was the first conviction for racism-related cases in professional soccer in Spain.

Vinícius has been repeatedly targeted for racial abuse during away games in Spain despite attempts by the league and authorities to stamp out such incidents. *—PTI*

Vinícius Júnior PHOTO: PTI